

‘THE MEMORY OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR AND THE FAMILIES OF BRITISH INTERNATIONAL BRIGADERS’

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SYNOPSIS

The Memory of the Spanish Civil War and the Families of British International Brigaders is primarily about how the conflict is remembered and commemorated in Britain and the recollections and experiences of the relatives of veterans of the British Battalion both during and after the civil war.

The literary review discusses the changing representative emphasis, reproduction and interpretation of the British Brigade and civil war. A contextual analysis of the war through the written and oral image of the combatant is also approached by comparing and contrasting with World War One. The final section assesses the relatives' involvement and presence in the historiography.

The second chapter on the public memory of the civil war and International Brigade deals with the ceremonial remembrance around memorials, the relatives' place in expressions of memory, the archival bias away from the family, artistic and cultural representations and the civil war's organised heritage kept by the International Brigade veterans' association.

The political heritage of the civil war forms the third major section of the research, looking at the influence of the Communist Party on relatives both during and after the conflict. This includes the Communist Party officials' role in Spain placating anxious volunteers and how they dealt with the financial and emotional requirements of relatives in Britain. After the war their impact on newly emerging families will be explored with particular reference to the veterans in the political education of their children.

The fourth and final section addresses the important impacts of the International Brigade and civil war on the relatives. Short-term covers factors that affected relatives during the civil war period. It is written mainly from the perspective of the families, how they coped with absence, the attitudes of the wider community and the death of volunteers. Their role in keeping up morale in Spain is also explored. This section relies very much on existing letters between volunteers and relatives.

The period after Spain deals predominantly with the themes raised in the testimonies of twenty-four relations. This covers the variety of ways the memory has been transmitted and transferred from veteran to relative.

A final conclusion quantifies the role and place of the relatives past and present within the memory of the International Brigade and Spanish Civil War in Britain.

ABBREVIATIONS

CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
DAC	Dependants' Aid Committee
FIB	Friends of the International Brigade
FO	Foreign Office
GLC	Greater London Council
IBA	International Brigade Association
ILP	Independent Labour Party
IWM	Imperial War Museum
MML	Marx Memorial Library
NF	National Front
NJC	National Joint Committee
NMLH	National Museum of Labour History
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista
SMAC	Spanish Medical Aid Committee
SWCC	South Wales Coalfield Collection
SWML	South Wales Miners' Library
SWP	Socialist Workers' Party
VALB	Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion
WCML	Working-Class Movement Library
WFA	Western Front Association
YCL	Young Communist League

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INTRODUCTION

Personally I don't attach any importance to my position and I wouldn't have thought it's important...in a wider context.¹

We're not members of the IB that's what it's all about.²

The family of British International Brigaders are a group of people sidelined by the veterans and by remembrance of the Spanish Civil War. As the above quotations demonstrate, relatives have to a certain extent marginalized themselves, helped by the overwhelming interest in the ex-volunteer. They attach little importance to their own position and generally do not see a role for themselves as transferors of the memory. Nor do they conceive the possibility that their experiences would have interest in their own right. This was one of the aspects of the families' story that first took my interest as an MA student and made me decide to embark on a study of their lives. In the course of work on the Spanish community in Abercrave and Dowlais, South Wales,³ I conducted an unrecorded interview with a man who had lost an uncle fighting in Spain.⁴ He spoke in great detail of his experiences growing up in a small Welsh village as a second generation Spaniard. The importance he attached to his testimony as part of the Spanish community was obvious but of the repercussions of his uncle's death on himself and the rest of his family there was very little. Was it too painful, too difficult and too private a memory?

The concept of buried pain lay dormant at the back of my mind for some months until I saw Ken Loach's controversial film about the civil war, *Land and Freedom*.⁵ Quite unaware of the furore caused by the film, I was captivated by one of the opening scenes. The veteran's granddaughter discovers for the first time his box of civil war memorabilia and through this pieces together his extraordinary story. Her involvement was seen by many as an unimportant, even unnecessary, part of the

¹ Interview with Jeremy, 9 February 1998. The son of an International Brigader.

² Interview with Martha, 15 March 1999. The wife of an International Brigader.

³ 'Our Friends From Spain: The Social and Political Lives of the Spanish Immigrants in Abercrave, South Wales', unpublished ms, 1996. A copy of this is held at the South Wales Miners' Library in Swansea.

⁴ Interview conducted in February 1996, Abercrave, South Wales.

⁵ *Land and Freedom*, directed by Ken Loach, screenplay by Jim Allen, 1993.

film. Very few of the relatives I subsequently spoke to identified with this scene⁶ so concerned were they by the political message Loach wanted to deliver.

So here were two different kinds of unspoken testimony and the inspiration for a research project. The families who had lived with the knowledge and consequences of their relatives' engagement first hand for over sixty years and those who were new to the experience. From my own haphazard discovery of these people a wealth of questions emerged.

Firstly, why does the Memory of the Spanish Civil War and the Families of British International Brigaders need to be researched? What is so significant about the way in which a conflict fought over sixty years ago, in a foreign country, by a numerically small group of men and women is remembered? Indeed is there any significance in what the War meant to their families? Much is now known about British volunteers' involvement in the Spanish conflict because of the wealth of material on every aspect of their engagement. Research in progress still concentrates on the experiences of the men and women who went to Spain between 1936-39 in preference to any other angle or interpretation. Thus one of the aims of the work was to measure the sociological, political, cultural and personal impact on those who did not take part but were linked in some way to those who did. Therefore central to this study are the opinions, experiences and memories of the relatives of International Brigaders.

Although the study examines the thoughts, feelings and emotions of children, spouses and siblings, the use of psychoanalytical techniques is not engaged. However, because relatives do talk about family memories, which naturally involve the contemplation of painful or happy thoughts, it was thought pertinent to incorporate a simple analysis of how they felt, especially as many of the respondents attempted to analyse their feelings during interviews. The project combines these responses, mainly through interviews and letters, with symbolic images, the acquisition of political knowledge, literary opinions, interaction with outside organisations and their wider community, to illustrate how non-protagonists can become part of the public and private experience of an event – the British involvement in the Spanish Civil War.

⁶ An exception was John, interviewed 6 July 1998, who stated that his father had a similar box of memorabilia.

George Mosse writing about the Great War, described “the ‘myth of war experience’ in which the position of the front-line soldier is the only valid vantage point for understanding the war. Such a privileging of the soldiers’ experience engendered a terrible callousness towards the feeling of the bereaved,”⁷ can be applied equally to the study of the International Brigade in Britain. This does not only result in ‘callousness.’ Large gaps have been left in our knowledge making us also ignorant of the repercussions of the war. Therefore if we know nothing about the social, cultural and personal impact on the family, we also leave many holes in our understanding of how the Spanish Civil War is remembered in Britain. The two together, in conjunction with the vast amount of research already conducted on the British Brigaders, goes far in giving a more comprehensive understanding on the impact of the civil war.

Each of the four chapters in this study is designed to examine the key aspects of - literary representations, the public memory, the political heritage of the war and the short and long-term impact on Brigaders’ relatives. The role of the family is intrinsic to these key areas. Therefore the first chapter on literary representation is not only a review of British literature on the Spanish Civil War over the past sixty-four years but includes the opinions of the relatives and their contribution to the literary heritage. It is split into three main headings. The first deals with the changing image of the civil war through British literary interpretations and the influence of political, social and cultural events on writing about the conflict, along with the changing nature of historical writing. Literature on Spain’s civil war and the International Brigade has done much to enhance the myths that surround the period and the literary chapter examines how writing has contributed to a mythical construct and the development of various kinds of memory.

The civil war and intervening years is analysed chronologically, 1936-39, 1940-1960, 1961-1975 and from Franco’s death to the present day, because of the pronounced features of each period.

⁷ Mosse, G.L. “Two World Wars and the Myth of War Experience,” in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 21, (1986), pp. 491-513. Quoted in A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946*, Berg, Oxford, 1994, p.120-121.

The second section is concerned with the written and oral image of the combatant by comparing and contrasting the civil war with World War One, using the interviews, diaries and memoirs of the soldiers. It raises and discusses the existence of a carefully constructed image of the Brigader, designed to highlight the positive aspects of their engagement. The association between the veterans' organisation, run until recently by the late Bill Alexander, and the representation of official memory is discussed with reference to George Orwell, Laurie Lee, Ernest Hemingway and Ken Loach seen by the former as contentious literature. For the survivors this raises the issue of acceptable and tabooed writing on the British Brigaders. What has become popular and mainstream, such as *Land and Freedom* or George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*,⁸ seems to attract a more varied and wider audience and is always deemed alternative or oppositional memory. Why is this?

The third and final section of this initial chapter assesses the family of Brigaders as a literary presence and their representation in the literature by scholars. The former, although quantitatively poor in terms of both volume and detail about the private aspects of the veterans' lives, illustrates some interesting features, particularly, the concentration on the volunteers' engagement and political achievements outside family life.

The second chapter will focus primarily on the public memory of the civil war in Britain. It deals with five main areas – the ceremonial remembrance, the relatives' place in the expression of memory, archival material, the artistic and the war's organised heritage. The public commemoration of the war is dominated by the dramatic increase in memorials to International Brigaders since Franco's death in 1975. The questions of the significance of their appearance, along with the symbolism of their wording will be discussed. Are the vast numbers of memorials compared with other countries representative of a very British phenomenon? Is it an example of the existence of a beleagued yet proud labour movement? The majority of memorials were dedicated during Margaret Thatcher's terms in office. Could they be the consequence of external factors such as the popularisation of the civil war

⁸ G. Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Penguin, 1989, (1938). Original date of publication in brackets.

since democracy was restored in Spain? Have the monuments become sites of mourning or are they purely symbolic of the war or the Brigades?

The place of the family within the historical and contemporary context of the civil war and the International Brigades and within British history will be examined along with the significance of the offer of Spanish citizenship to ex-Brigaders. This also includes what is left of the Spanish Civil War in terms of memory and how it should be commemorated. In addition, the role of the individual relative in developing and keeping the memory of the war alive will be discussed along with the importance of this within the family. The unpublished heritage investigates the evolution of the civil war archives and their contents and how they have inevitably favoured the study of the Brigaders over their families.

A key factor in examining artistic expression, film, plays, dance and song, is whether these forms are responsible for the myths that surround the Brigader and the civil war, or are they a product of it? None belong to the cultural mainstream but significantly the most popularised, *Land and Freedom* and the song, *If you tolerate this your children will be next* fall outside of official recognition.

The place of official memory represented by the veterans' association has come to dominate the model of civil war remembrance. This leads to an analysis of how such a small group has been so successful in leading the way in remembering the International Brigade.

The third chapter engages the idea that an integral and important part of the civil war and Brigade experience for both veterans and their relatives was politics; falling almost exclusively under the influence of the Communist Party. This is true for the period of the civil war, the Cold War and up to the present day. Therefore it follows the lifespan of the veterans, along with the childhood and adult experiences of their relatives. Can the Communist Party be held up for scrutiny over their treatment of relatives during the civil war? Were they doing all they could to alleviate the anxiety caused and did they feel an obligated to the families? An important aspect of the Communist Party's image making process was the monopolization of the deaths of men in Spain, which continued well after the war had ended in 1939. It is highly likely that this was detrimental to family relations, suggesting that the Party's motives were purely selfish. In the end their attitude and that of individual members

may have had a lasting impact on their children. Could the deciding factors over who became political and the reasons why be put down purely to individual preference (many families of siblings were different despite being brought up in similar environments) or is it the result of their upbringing?

Although the Communist Party led the way in organising the Brigade, the conflict involved the whole of the labour movement one way or another. As a consequence the Brigader became part of left-wing tradition resulting in the crystallisation of symbolic motifs to describe the war; democracy v. barbarism, good v. evil. Could the role of the labour movement be described as engaged in the 1930's and defensive and defiant in the 1980's within the context of the civil war? One of the key questions is whether the volunteers were actually seen as political agitators or warriors? In many respects they had to be ideal *políticos* when often the strict disciplinarian orthodoxy of the Communist Party was difficult to maintain in confusing, chaotic battle situations. Their role as traditional warriors was also undermined by pacifist beliefs or even the romantic image of the well-read, gentle intellectual volunteer. Therefore this vision is full of ambiguity.

The final chapter is a study of the short and long-term impacts. The short-term impact examines factors that affected relatives during the civil war period. This was an extremely difficult time for family, not only emotionally but also financially. Yet was it any more problematic to them than the enforced absence created by World War Two, following so closely on the heels of the civil war?

Long-term impacts cover the period after the war and rely predominantly on themes expressed in the interviews with relatives, such as guilt, jealousy and boredom. It is also an ethnographic study, examining the homes of families, their contents and the significance of memorabilia. An important feature of this section is how the war has been transmitted orally from veteran to child or partner. Under discussion are the variety of ways the feelings of the relatives about the veteran were affected by their involvement and what it meant to have a freedom fighter in the family.

In addition this study presents numerous problems because it deals with three very contentious subject areas, which underpin the whole research; memory, oral history and war. It involves the examination of peoples' thoughts and experiences on a highly emotive and sometimes controversial subject, without recourse to

psychoanalytical theories. There are several key themes that became evident whilst conducting this research. The issues set out in the thematic headings below interweave throughout the four main chapters and give an indication of the problems involved in researching across three vast subject areas. Certainly one of the first questions seeking clarification is by no means straightforward. War, experienced with such frequency and ferocity during the twentieth century, has acquired multiple meanings, whether this is seen through the eyes of the combatant, the literary observer, or the historian.

The Meaning of War

The search for understanding of war became imperative after the Great War. The reality of total war affected not only the soldier but also the civilian. It saw both volunteers and conscripts leaving their families. Men who would ordinarily have nothing to do with the military, in the first instance volunteers, were spurred on by jingoistic fervour and adventure. More importantly, for the first time, meaning had to be found for the three million Britons who lost a close relative.⁹ World War One was the first time in Britain that the whole nation was mobilised in some capacity to win the war. The inter-war period saw the bereaved families become central to the public remembrance demonstrated by the Government's intention that the two-minute silence be, firstly for the bereaved, mainly women, secondly for the children, thirdly for the veterans and finally for the dead.¹⁰ The public commemoration of the Spanish Civil War in Britain cannot be comparable to that of the Great War for numerous reasons. Its small number of veterans and the dead of Spain are given priority in any remembrance occasion above family because of the control wielded by the International Brigade Association, able to achieve such power because for many years it was the only voice of the Brigade.

⁹ This did not include those who lost a cousin, fiancée, son-in-law, work colleague, friend or neighbour. A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, 1994, p.19.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.10.

Another significant difference between the meanings of the civil war¹¹ and both the First and Second World War involved the context in which they were waged. For the British¹² the World Wars were about fighting to defend and uphold the nation. Conversely the British Battalion was part of an international army, breaking the confines of nation, fighting for the liberty and freedom of a country other than their own, ultimately trying to prevent their own homes being overtaken by the fascist threat. So in sharp contrast to the sheer weight of numbers of the Great War, there was the 'band of brothers' brought together by a political cause, an ideological solidarity rather than patriotism.

As the First World War progressed into a long drawn out conflict, patriotism was superseded by comradeship and what Ferguson describes as the need to die for one's friends, as opposed to one's country.¹³ Similarly, in Spain there was camaraderie, however, in many respects this had been initiated before many of the men had met, in solidarity for the cause and for communistic ideals. However, the cause for many did not override personal friendships made in the trenches, the few memoirs that were short on political dogma (usually based on diaries) appear to reflect as closely as possible what volunteers were really feeling at the time. The edited version of Syd Hamm's diary appears in a book *Brother Against Brother*¹⁴ alongside the memoirs of a Welsh man who fought on the Nationalist side. Hamm was a dedicated member of the Communist Party but his diary, with short staccato entries, mentioned little about politics instead recording his health problems, food, friends, letters received and drunkenness in the ranks. The latter concerned him greatly. Fred Thomas's edited diary entries appear in his memoir, *To Tilt At Windmills*.¹⁵ They are a fuller, more descriptive account of his experiences. Of La Pasionaria's legendary speech, in October 1938, he dispels one of the many myths of the British Brigaders that they

¹¹ For the sake of abbreviation and to avoid confusion when the term 'civil war' or 'war' is used, it indicates the Spanish Civil War and will be reproduced in the lower case. All other conflicts i.e. First World War, Second World War will be capitalised.

¹² British here exclude the following; Communist Party members who saw the Second World Wars as imperialistic until Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941 and pacifists of both World Wars.

¹³ Niall Ferguson in *The Pity of War*, Penguin, 1998 discusses this in his chapter, 'The Death Instinct: Why Men Fought', pp 339-366.

¹⁴ R. Stradling, (Ed.) *Brother Against Brother: Experiences of a British Volunteer in the Spanish Civil War*, Sutton Publishing Ltd. Glos., 1998. Stradling an academic at the University of Wales, Cardiff had the diary given to him by a woman who had known Sid Hamm.

¹⁵ F. Thomas, *To Tilt At Windmills*, Michigan State University Press, Michigan, 1996.

had heard La Pasionaria's speech as she had delivered it at the Farewell Parade in Barcelona.

29 October 1938. Finally we recognised the spare figure of the indomitable "La Pasionaria" who quickly had the crowd roaring their approval of her every word. But we British were not near enough to hear much, so I have had to wait until today to hear her stirring speech.¹⁶

The civil war in common with the Great War continues to be punctuated by myth and the heroic status of the warrior. Yet its legends have superseded the status and feelings of the veterans' families. Literature, the work of the historian and some of the volunteers elevated the ex-Brigaders to a position far above the relatives in terms of importance within the public memory. Britain is not unique in this. Friends and family associations have also been organised in Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Russia and the oldest in France, suggesting they too are unable to become associate members of their respective veterans' associations.¹⁷ However, in America the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (VALB) have grown into a huge group due to the welcome given to all of those interested in keeping the remembrance alive. Some veterans and relatives spoke of how they would like to see this happening in Britain.¹⁸

Likewise the dead have been deified in numerous ways. For example, nearly twice the numbers of memorials are dedicated to those who died in Spain as opposed to all, including volunteers, who returned.¹⁹ A roll of honour appears in the official publications, *British Volunteers for Liberty*²⁰ and *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*. The focus has been on the combatants as a group and official memory represented in the public sphere by a small section of this group - the IBA. Relatives of the Brigaders have thus struggled to make their voice heard over the hegemony of

¹⁶ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, p.164.

¹⁷ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

¹⁸ Interviews with Susie, 24 November 1998 and IJ, 24 August 1998.

¹⁹ Information gathered from, B. Alexander et al., *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, Alan Sutton Publishing, Glos., 1996.

²⁰ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty: Spain 1936-39*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1982.

public memory. Making one of the key questions the influence of the ever-decreasing veterans' organisation on remembrance of the civil war in Britain.

When Official History Mirrors Legend

The official history of the British Battalion written and managed by the International Brigade Association (IBA) is a history that defends and supports the Communist Party line and the integrity of the ex-Brigaders, excluding any other interpretations of their role outside of these parameters. Official history is considered as representations acceptable to the veterans' association - the IBA. The oppositional and alternative memory is closely linked, both being at odds with the official memory supported by, even created by the IBA. Oppositional memory is certainly more confrontational towards IBA sponsored remembrance of the volunteers. It usually includes the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) and other groups opposed to the Communist Party and its version of the ideological struggles that took place during the Spanish conflict. Texts or groups represent the alternative memory that falls outside of the Brigade, such as George Orwell or the Independent Labour Party contingent.

The language and images used in the official histories of the Fifteenth Battalion are of solidarity, almost super-human bravery and endurance, selflessness, unswerving political faith and sheer determination in the face of overwhelming odds. Qualities not dissimilar to warriors of the British Empire. Whilst many of the Brigaders possessed some or all of these qualities, others who fell outside of these parameters have been marginalized such as the habitual drinkers or those who deserted.²¹ However, individuals who volunteered for Spain unconnected to the Brigade or the Communist Party, in particular the small Independent Labour Party (ILP) contingent attached to its sister organisation in Spain, the POUM,²² have been ostracised.

The characteristics of the exemplary volunteer in Spain soon became the only type of Brigader worthy of a place in the official memory of the civil war. The continual

²¹ Volunteers joined of their own free will (although some were asked by the Communist Party to go) but once there they could not leave without permission. If they did so, it was desertion.

²² The Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista (POUM) was a revolutionary party closely associated with Trotskyism. They saw proletarian revolution as the means by which fascism would be defeated in Spain. The best-known book to examine the role of the POUM is Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. There is also Franz Borkenau's *The Spanish Cockpit*, Pluto Press, Australia, 1986, (1937).

defence of the ideal freedom fighter by the Communist Party and later the Committee of the IBA contributed to the myths and legends that surround the British in Spain. However, the definitive moment for the creation of the hero International Brigader was La Pasionaria's speech, on October 28th 1938, addressed to the departing volunteers in Barcelona. "You are history. You are legend," closely linking them with the power of language and words in creating myths. The two official histories of the Battalion²³ were eager to follow both the Communist Party line and to use the language of heroes to tell the story of the Brigade. "The epic first day in the history of the British Battalion was ended,"²⁴ finishes Bill Rust's account of the first day at Jarama, where in over three days the British lost over half of their men. Rust's official history, sanctioned by the Communist Party was published in January 1939 before the end of the war. The *Daily Worker* correspondent in Spain had access to the records of the Battalion, which included the official diary. However, as can be expected, the role of the Communist Party and its members was presented without criticism.

Bill Alexander's history, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, has the benefit of hindsight and a more extensive archive, despite the diary of the Brigade having mysteriously vanished in 1940. *Volunteers for Liberty* was written at the instigation of the IBA Committee to redress the distortions of truth,²⁵ told about the Brigade in the intervening forty years. The structure of the IBA and Alexander's personality suggest it was very much his own idea to write the history. It was based closely on Bill Rust's account. Any disagreements and criticisms of the Party mentioned in *Volunteers for Liberty* are turned round in order to portray its ultimate solidarity. They are not examined in any depth, or to the detriment of the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Alexander's history is also exclusive and so adds weight to the legendary status of the Brigades. Whilst using the testimony of many surviving Brigaders, his preference becomes apparent for those who remained true to a favourable Communist interpretation of the war. Men such as Fred Thomas, who possessed diaries kept during his time in Spain with the anti-tank battery, are not

²³ The two official histories of the British Battalion are W. Rust, *Britons in Spain*, New York International Publishers, 1939 and B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982.

²⁴ B. Rust, *Britons in Spain*, 1939, p.46.

²⁵ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.14.

included. Significantly, Thomas had left the Communist Party over the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) contingent was purposely left out because "... their story is quite separate from those who joined the International Brigade."²⁶ It is also a difficult and controversial story. Finally, the emotional distress caused to families was completely overlooked. Instead the work of the Dependants' and Wounded Aid Committee²⁷ is briefly examined to illustrate how the relatives of Brigaders had their financial hardship alleviated by the solidarity of working-class communities and a paternalistic Communist Party.

The exclusivity of the official histories of the war helped to establish the image of the politically dedicated freedom fighter as the only portrayal of the Brigade. The language used in these books has reinforced their heroic status alongside the defining moment of La Pasionaria's myth making epilogue to their time in Spain.

The Notion of Institutionalised Remembrance

The concept of an institutionalised memory of a war is a complex one. Essentially, it involves the emergence of an organisation that controls how the public memory of a conflict is expressed or represented. From the very establishment of the International Brigade Association (IBA) in 1939 the institutionalised remembrance of the Spanish Civil War became contentious to many ex-Brigaders and has remained so. The difficulty in the organisation's relationship with some of its members and with relatives more recently is sharply contrasted to the seeming unity found by the Western Front Association (WFA), an organisation inaugurated in 1980 to perpetuate the memory of the First World War.²⁸

Institutionalised remembrance was introduced by the state after the First World War. David Lloyd George's Liberal government took advantage of the post-war mood and so commemorations of the Armistice and the two-minute silence had a dual purpose. The state recognised that there had to be some form of collective expression for the

²⁶ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.15.

²⁷ The Dependants' & Wounded Aid Committee was probably conceived by Harry Pollitt and the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) but was run by leading members of the labour movement. Information on the Committee can be found in the 'International Brigade Collection,' Marx Memorial Library in file 'International Brigade Dependants' Aid,' B-8/H and in the pamphlet, *And After*, 1939, produced by the Committee.

²⁸ Western Front Association leaflet, 1998.

bereaved, which would conveniently coincide with unifying the nation at a time of industrial and political unrest.

It is our duty to see that they did not die in vain, and for the accomplishment of that duty all classes must combine as they did to win the war... There must be a truce in domestic quarrels, an end to industrial strife.²⁹

The veterans' own organisation, the British Legion could exert little power over the state's monopolisation of the public remembrance. Gregory states that the Legion had little organisation and its members were heterogeneous in their attitudes³⁰ mirroring the marginalisation of the veterans who were themselves in a kind of limbo between the living bereaved and their exalted dead comrades.

In a similar respect the veterans of Spain found they had been marginalized but within a very different context. The state had no inclination to control how the civil war was remembered because for them it had no place in the nation's collective memory. It was perceived as a subversive memory especially at the height of the Cold War in the 1950's and 1960's. Therefore, the IBA was and is in charge of public representations of the war and the Brigade. The process by which they achieved this is highlighted by the veterans' organisation's formation and subsequent aims. Created in March 1939 it focused initially on campaigns for the release of International Brigaders trapped inside France and North Africa. After 1945 it became the moral voice against Franco's regime. The Group's brief statement of aims, "...as front-line fighters for defence and advance of democracy against fascism,"³¹ were clearly directed towards achieving this in Spain. Since a Socialist government was democratically elected in 1981 the place of the IBA and, within a very different context, the Western Front Association is essentially the same, to preside over the organisation of how conflicts are remembered.

In a tradition where First World War veterans have been allowed little input in Britain over how the Great War should be remembered, the WFA has become an

²⁹ *Daily Express*, 11 November 1919, in A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, 1994, p.11.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.51.

³¹ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.248.

organisation outside of the veterans' jurisdiction. This is understandable now for practical reasons as the remaining, approximately 2,500, veterans are extremely old. However, their action plan mentions that the group are merely, "...in touch with remaining veterans."³² They have no input regarding the aims of the Association, which are adamant about remembering the dead of both sides. How reconciled are those left to institutionalised forgiveness? A televised visit to the battlefields and formalised mass graves, for the eightieth anniversary of the armistice, showed men still deeply affected by their experiences and the loss of friends. The Association's aim of reconciliation, its non-glorification of the war and apolitical stance are a reflection of post-world war culture.

In marked contrast, and because of the non-official nature of the Spanish Civil War in Britain, the veterans of Spain have remained in control of Brigade remembrance. More specifically, a small committee of the Association dictated the representation of how history saw them and the physical aspects of remembering, for example, at memorial gatherings. Other veterans struggled to have a voice outside of the Committee. Ironically, until recently, the Association of men who fought for democracy and freedom modelled itself on a small, non-plural committee that took decisions without the opinions of the other members. Its aims remained unchanged despite the different situation in Spain and the critics of the Communist Party in the second half of the twentieth century. The committee's outlook could also be seen as conservative, unlike the Western Front Association, which acknowledged the need to draw their members from outside of the combatants, it refused to let relatives become associate members, thus attempting to deny them a voice in the future keeping of the memory. Consequently it is highly political. For example, the small contingent of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), men who went to Spain with the same spirit, have been deliberately marginalized, denigrated, left off the central memorial in a reiterating of the old political battle lines between the POUM and the Communist Party in Spain. These struggles have further complicated the already contentious and complex representation of the war.

³² Leaflet published by the WFA, 1998.

The Conflict of Memory

Events taking place during the Spanish Civil War have made a strong and lasting impact on its memory in Britain. The most significant example of this was the Barcelona uprising in May 1937. The question of social revolution over the expediency of winning the war and the debate over the Communist Party's counter-revolutionary role in suppressing the POUM has had long-term repercussions on the way the Spanish conflict is remembered publicly. The political demarcations and loyalties of the period have remained almost as powerful today as they were during the war. Those with the most dominant voice have been Communist Party members. Individual ex-Brigaders with strong identification to the Party and its line in Spain represent the public face of the International Brigade. Their version of the events in Spain remains the only official, legitimate account. The alternative memories of various other groups have therefore been designated as 'opposition' memory.

To illustrate the conflicting dichotomy of memories and impressions of Spain, the people who went out there can be split into fairly distinct categories. These include, the non-communist members of the IBA who left the Party for various reasons and, in some respects, have had to, reappraise and analyse the role of the Communist Party in Spain but not their own reasoning which they remain clear about,

There were no medals to be won in Spain. But I believe that
no man, not even that Band of Brothers who fought upon St.
Crispian's Day, nor that later Few of 1940, justly honoured
though they be, was ever prouder of his part than are we who
were the International Brigade.³³

As they have not lost faith with why they went to Spain these men have continued to be an active part of public commemorations of the war. However, they did not agree with the undemocratic way decisions were made within the Association, until recently, or with the dominance of the Communist Party narrative. Their responses to differing interpretations of the Brigades are individualised and less influenced by

³³ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996, p.170. Fred Thomas left the Communist Party over, "[i]ncreasing difficulties with local and national Party bosses, culminating in Hungary..." letter to NS dated 1 March 1999.

political considerations. When veterans were told, by the IBA, to boycott the premiere of Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* some ignored the dictat. Their opinions were broad but similar, that the film was, as it said it was, 'a story of the Spanish Civil War,' albeit an unrepresentative one.

The memories of Brigaders who became disillusioned by their part in the conflict are decidedly more oppositional than the last group. The idealism that inspired them to volunteer was easily crushed by the realities of war and the politics of the extreme left which made it especially hard for them to remain positive about their role. These veterans held the Communist Party solely responsible for stamping out the revolutionary spirit of the cause within them. The group have been particularly vociferous in publicly denouncing the Party. Jason Gurney's 'rather fanciful'³⁴ memoir, *Crusade in Spain*³⁵ (the title incidentally using the terminology of the Nationalists) includes a bitter denunciation of Harry Pollitt. The IBA links this negativism with a more sinister political agenda – to criticise and undermine Communism, in a society already hostile to it. Events throughout the Soviet Union's post-1945 history shook the convictions of many in the communist movement. Alison Macleod's response must have been fairly typical after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and the revelation of Stalin's purges.

[Socialism's] such a good system that it's bound to triumph
even when it's led by scoundrels,...I insist on being free to
say when Socialism is led by scoundrels – or even a drunken
old fool [Khrushchev] who can't keep his mouth shut.³⁶

Prior to Hungary the defection of Tito's Yugoslavia caused a massive split because "...Yugoslavia offered an alternative model of communism to that provided by the Soviet Union, hitherto regarded as the only possible one."³⁷ However, it was the denunciations of Tito – an ex-member of the International Brigade that caused some

³⁴ Veteran Fred Thomas used these words to describe Gurney's memoir in an informal interview, November 1998.

³⁵ J. Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, Faber & Faber, 1974.

³⁶ A. Macleod, *The Death of Uncle Joe*, Methuen, 1997, p.259.

³⁷ L. Schapiro, 'Soviet Attitudes to National Communism in Western Europe,' in H. Machin (Ed.) *National Communism in Western Europe: A Third Way for Socialism?* Methuen, 1983, p.47.

former volunteers to leave the Party rather than ideological considerations.³⁸ For some, defence of the individual qualities it took to be a successful member of the Brigade outshone politics and the comradeship engendered during the war were more important. Events that occurred after Tito's split with Moscow were likely to have an effect on the children as well as the ex-Brigaders. Hungary, already mentioned, influenced children now in their sixties and seventies. The 'Prague Spring' of 1968, which was the source of much of the Western European parties' open criticism of the Soviet Union,³⁹ affected younger offspring. Even the struggles of the Polish Solidarity union must have made a difference to how some felt about communist methods. However for less hard-line Brigaders it was their former comrades' disillusionment with the cause of Spain that was the most galling. Spain remained for many the centre of their ideological thinking.

The final grouping more closely mirrors the left-wing splits of the 1930's. The ILP sent a small contingent of approximately forty men to Spain. They became attached to their Spanish sister organisation the POUM, a party always associated with Leon Trotsky. Due to the controversial role of the Communist Party in suppressing the POUM and the accidental involvement of the ILP,⁴⁰ the latter have been marginalized by the IBA's constructed memory of the war. The memorial on the South Bank is significantly dedicated to the men and women of the International Brigade, of which the ILP was no part. Bob Smillie who died suspiciously in prison while under the jurisdiction of the Communist Party⁴¹ does not appear on the Roll of Honour or on any memorial. In official memory it would appear they have been forgotten. However, their exclusion is political and their presence as a group of men is a reminder of George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.⁴² His subsequent denunciation of the Communist Party is still highly controversial to the IBA provoking strong defences of the meaning of the conflict.

³⁸ Interview with Bernard McKenna, Manchester, 15 April 1998.

³⁹ H. Machin (ed.), *National Communism in Western Europe*, 1983, p.50.

⁴⁰ The ILP were given leave after three months on the Aragon front. Their arrival in Barcelona coincided with the struggle between the Communists and the anarchists and the POUM.

⁴¹ See T. Buchanan's interesting and thorough investigation of the facts surrounding Bob Smillie's death in "The Death of Bob Smillie, the Spanish Civil War and the Eclipse of the ILP," in *The Historical Journal*, 40, 2, 1997, pp.435-461.

⁴² The novelist became part of the ILP contingent after he was turned down for the International Brigade but was not a member of the Party.

Unlike many European intellectuals he had not understood the essential clash between liberty and fascism.⁴³

Therefore the ILP volunteers represent the strongest oppositional memory for International Brigaders. Subsequently, the socialist left and adherents of Trotskyism have claimed their possible role. It ensures that the schism remains deep. At the premiere of *Land and Freedom* in 1993, both factions displayed the divisions of 1937 in a heated audience debate about the film.

Thus over sixty years after the end of the civil war, conflicting memories cleaved along strong political lines have been part of the narrative of remembrance. The long-term impact of Spain's remembrance over subsequent generations of children and grandchildren has been directly affected by this political debate. This can be intentional or overt, for example, when children join particular political parties in common with their parents' affiliation and defend their interpretation of the war. The son of an ex-Brigader stated that he proposed to develop and keep the memory of Spain alive, "...by being a witness and an active member of my Party," – the Communist Party.⁴⁴ There are subtler ways. Those who wished to assert their political independence, still identify by their support of anti-fascist organisations such as the Friends,

The purpose is to keep alive the interest in the involvement of the International Brigade...not as a solitary historical event in the past but as part of a common struggle enshrined in the aims of the Spanish Republic and its fight against international fascism.⁴⁵

Therefore they continue to perpetuate the memory of what the Brigade are so strongly associated with; liberty and internationalism, these being the dominant official representations of the war.

⁴³ B. Alexander, 'George Orwell and Spain,' C. Norris (ed), *Inside the Myth: George Orwell Views from the Left*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1984, p.85.

⁴⁴ Questionnaire of Joe, Question 18.

⁴⁵ Friends information leaflet, 1996/97.

The Weight of Remembering

No less complex or diverse than the public remembrance is the private memory of the Spanish war. It concerns the family and the environs of the home and can be split into two main areas. Firstly, the oral memory and spoken experience of the protagonist, covering not only their stories and anecdotes but also the political message, ideals and principles they wish to transfer onto the non-protagonist. Story telling may have suffered with some families in favour of relating political doctrine and principles. The latter was not so painful for both as it involved discussing the less emotive and disturbing aspects of war.

The physical memory pertains to the objects around the home. Memorabilia such as photographs and books about Spain and the International Brigade are also examined. Objects often triggered reminiscences that could take the form of story telling or at the very least anecdotes. Both oral and physical memories can be affected by the personalities of the relater and recipient and their relationship as a family and with each other. Some veterans may have wanted to talk more often about their life as a soldier whilst some non-protagonists lacked the desire to listen quite so intently as their other siblings.

Political intensity was the greatest distinguishing factor in providing proof of further special distinctions from the experiences of other soldiers and their families. The civil war was imbued with ideologies rather than patriotism. The comparatively small number of Brigaders compared to the mainly conscripted armies of the World Wars would have engendered a sense of the unusual situation and thus isolation from the mainstream consciousness of veteran status. Did this have an effect on the weight of remembering? Was the burden of knowing the unique place of their relative a particularly difficult experience for the families to live with? Certainly relationships did suffer as a consequence. An indeterminate number of spouses experienced jealousy at the prominent role played by Spain in the lives of their partners, of which they were not a part, or guilt at being unable to understand the intense emotions experienced. For the children of veterans the burden of memory may have been greater. There may also have been subtle pressure to conform to the memory they received particularly in the political sense. 'My father was prepared to die for freedom and Communism, therefore I have a moral obligation to believe in these

ideologies also.’ However, nothing can be so clear-cut as that. After a childhood living with a strong political and ideological presence and the heroism and the myths that surround the Brigade, it may have been too difficult to resist ‘the truth’ that had been so intrinsically part of their lives. Thus many children responded by saying, ‘it was always part of my life, all I ever knew.’ Any oppositional thoughts could consequently deny their whole upbringing, their whole system of beliefs.

These questions are problematic in an historical study. Yet some of the respondents in the sample freely acknowledged certain emotional feelings, part of the natural process of talking about past experiences. In fact some relatives found being interviewed for the first time about their lives with Brigade veterans therapeutic or cathartic, like lifting a burden from their minds. Therefore it is believed to be ethically sound to include these responses as part of the private construct of an historical study.

Family members have also been affected by literary and physical representations of the war. Fiction, memoir and academic works, monuments, memorabilia such as letters and even archives and their contents have all had an impact on the way they remember the civil war. In order to interpret the symbols and extricate meaning from the various sources, a methodological approach examining all representations either directly or indirectly associated with the relatives must be engaged.

Sources and Methods of Investigation

The oral history of the International Brigade, including medical and ancillary staff, has been given much attention by researchers over the past twenty years. More recently, studies have started to focus on local Brigaders, their social, economic and political background, motivations for volunteering and their testimonies if they are still alive. With interest still firmly placed with the Brigaders and so much work still to be done,⁴⁶ what then was the justification for the unusual angle of this research? The project’s aim was not to undertake another history of the volunteers. The study of relatives of the British Brigaders places the effects of war onto another plane, focusing on the public, social and political world as well as the private and personal.

⁴⁶ For example there is no comprehensive study of the Scottish Brigaders.

The questions arising from this approach require a predominantly oral input. Does the tradition of story telling within the family have more power of transmission over political participation? Can the assumption be made that the story is merely an isolated incident whilst the political influences the rest of their lives? Finally, moving out into the families' wider associations, what impact did their community and neighbourhood bring to bear on them? Has the experience of (usually) one member of the family being a volunteer in Spain had a particularly adverse affect or strong influence?

The type of material purposely collected by oral historians and deposited in public archives illustrates the lack of interest in the families of Brigaders as subjects in their own right. Interviews with veterans make up a considerable amount of the collections on the volunteers. Two extensive audio projects have been undertaken. One promoted by the Imperial War Museum started in 1976 and has continued during the 1980's and 1990's to collect the oral testimonies of people who went to Spain.⁴⁷ The other, begun in the late 1960's and part of Hywel Francis' research on the Welsh International Brigaders, now makes up part of the South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC).⁴⁸ The Collection includes various studies of local leaders and political figures, as well as Welsh volunteers and some of their relatives.

The extensive research carried out on the social and political formation of the British Brigaders over the past twenty-five years has dispelled the myth that the volunteers were mainly middle-class intellectuals but it has also reduced their world into that one experience of war. Interviewing techniques have been concerned almost exclusively with their experiences in Spain and motivation for going and have been less interested by their lives after the event or its effects on those close to them.

The exclusive interest in Brigaders and their engagement in Spain has led to a minority of the veterans believing that enquiries made to their relatives during this research were really about themselves. Questionnaires addressed to the relative have sometimes been completed by veterans. Letters explaining that the research is based

⁴⁷ 'The Spanish Civil War Collection,' Imperial War Museum (IWM), London.

⁴⁸ 'South Wales Coalfield Collection' (SWCC), South Wales Miners' Library, Swansea and University of Wales, Swansea.

on their relations have been answered by veterans eager to impart their own testimonies and the impact and influence of the war on themselves.

The few surviving letters from family to Brigaders have been invaluable in the reconstruction of their parents' reactions and their own attitudes to their family and its place within their political priorities. For practical reasons, volunteers were unable to keep many letters on their person, others have admitted to disposing of them. Their relatives aware of its importance deposited into archives most of the surviving correspondence written by veterans and others were just happy to put them into the hands of researchers knowing a use would be found. The audio collections of the SWCC and the Imperial War Museum have a small number of interviews with family.⁴⁹ These are usually collected from the widows of veterans, as a way of finding out information about them. Symptomatically one such interview was with Mary Freeman; her friend Mrs Booth, also the wife of a Brigader, (who was still alive and had already been interviewed by the Imperial War Museum) began talking after the interviewer had finished with Mrs Freeman. Mrs Booth said, "I bet you've heard all this before?" to which the interviewer replied, "it's good to hear both sides,"⁵⁰ meaning both sides of the same story, the veteran's story not an individual testimony which puts a different slant on the experience of war. The tape was inexplicably switched off halfway through her fascinating recollections. At the South Wales Coalfield Collection relatives appear to have been interviewed in their own right although often they were politically active and prominent people within their community.

The official archive of the International Brigade and the most comprehensive and varied documentary source is held at the Marx Memorial Library. A volunteer helped set up the archive in 1975. It has now become the most popular archive for relatives to donate material. The bulk of its content concentrates on the period between 1936 and 1975 concerned with the struggle for democracy in Spain during those years. This coincided with the most active period of the IBA. Of particular use for this research are documents that relate to the Dependants' and Wounded Aid

⁴⁹ There are eight testimonies with the 'Spanish Civil War Collection' at the Imperial War Museum Sound Archive and five at the South Wales Coalfield Collection.

⁵⁰ Interview with Mary Freeman, 842/2, Spanish Civil War Collection, 1976, Imperial War Museum, London.

Committee.⁵¹ They give an indication of how relatives survived financially during the volunteers' time away and the attitude of the Communist Party towards family members. The archive also has many items relating to the public commemoration of the war, with programmes and newspaper articles on the fortieth, fiftieth and sixtieth anniversaries, on memorial gatherings and the correspondence of interested parties. Political pamphlets were initially useful background on the Communist Party but they also reinforce the conventional images of the volunteers such as their legendary status and the many myths that surround them.

There are questions that the existing archive material addresses but many more remain untouched. The immediate effects of the war on close family can be determined by examining the reactions of parents and siblings. Existing archival material was useful for initial reactions. An indication of the volunteers' state of mind can be gleaned from veterans' letters from Spain, as they respond to concerns raised. Quite often veterans related the story of their parents' reactions during an oral testimony but their interviewers rarely asked them. Up-to-date interviews with veterans produced mixed results. Some were very open about the way their parents' responded and spoke in some depth while others were more reticent. This can be interpreted in several ways. Perhaps they felt some guilt at the recollection, or they did not believe it to be important, or quite simply there was little or no reaction that has stayed in their mind. Siblings are more forthcoming about the effects it had on their family, possibly because they were not the instigator.

However, where the existing archives fail is their sketchy information on the impact of Spain upon family life. How the children were affected can only be ascertained by interviewing them and only if they are prepared to discuss emotional elements. The interviews with respondents in the sample were not designed to be psychoanalytical. By creating a new archive of oral and written information the questions that arise regarding the private and personal repercussions of Spain can be examined more thoroughly. There were two main methods of investigation in compiling the archive of new material.

⁵¹ A Committee administered by the labour movement to look after the dependents of men in Spain and the care and maintenance of wounded volunteers.

The first approach was made by a questionnaire (**Appendix One**), the initial point of contact with relatives, accompanied by a standard letter personalised for each recipient. The main purpose of the questionnaire was to aid in constructing the interviews. It was not devised to be used for this purpose, although it was always recognised as useful for background and statistical information. The questionnaire's value in terms of statistical data could be limited because the sample size is fairly small but this is counterbalanced by the merits of analysing the group in isolation and only occasionally bringing outside evidence to back up statements. The questionnaire's real worth has become apparent, as the project has developed, becoming the only piece of actual evidence of those relatives who had little interest in the war. The people who responded affirmatively to an interview were those most interested in the Brigade and Spain. They usually have active and / or positive memories of their relative's involvement.

The second main approach involved the interviews. The majority were undertaken with the children, followed by spouses, siblings, grandchildren and then more distant relationships. (See **Table 0b**) Interviews took place in their homes where possible and have lasted between one and three and a half hours, depending on how talkative the respondents were. Only one interview was conducted with each relative.

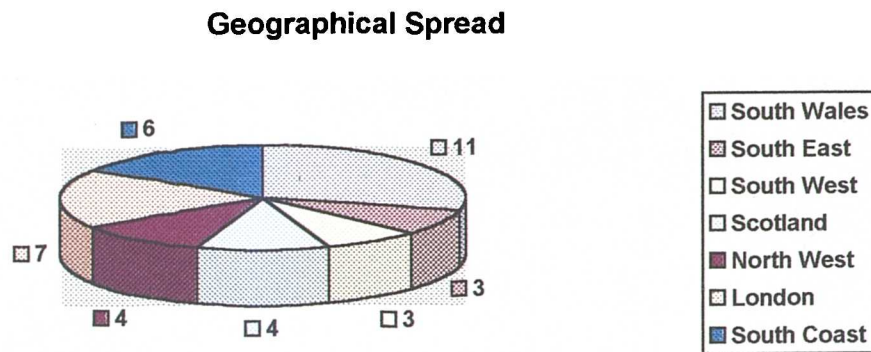
Some further sources have been incorporated into the research methodology. The first are letters, the uses of existing correspondence have been mentioned but they were not designed for this research. Letters written to myself, mainly by veterans in response to the appeals for help in contacting relatives, are revealing of how enthusiastic or reticent they are about the research. Two correspondents in particular became close and supportive of it. (See **Appendix Eight**)

Finally an ethnographic study of the homes of relatives was conducted. Interviews usually took place in the main living room where observations could be made about cultural memorabilia on display. Often photographs were shown during interviews but they were never directly asked for and this approach was thought to be a measure of the enthusiasm of the subjects. Respondents often showed a special study or room devoted mainly to the literature they had collected or inherited. The role of the interviewer was that of observer in these cases, an invitation must be offered, without asking, indicating a desire to share the physical attributes of their memory.

The Sample

There has been no geographical, gender, relationship or class based pattern to how contacts have been made and questionnaires sent. The addresses of veterans were not made available and so it was a case of the domino effect, relying heavily on the good will of individual veterans prepared to divulge their contacts. The address of one veteran, for example, produced many potential informants. Although a slow, haphazard process, this has produced a good mixture of respondents from all over the country and from different backgrounds. **Chart 0a** shows the geographical spread of the respondents in the sample.

Chart 0a



There were no contacts from Ireland and only three responses from Scotland but good representation from South Wales. Contacts were made more easily in South Wales due to the enthusiasm of one veteran and the brother of another, who provided many addresses. This can be coupled with their eagerness to participate once they had been written to, illustrative of the strong oral tradition and pride in their own history. Although the majority of veterans were from working-class backgrounds their children and grandchildren are or have been professionals, especially in the education or other parts of the public sector. **Appendix Four** is a comparative table showing the professions of veterans and the subsequent employment type of their relatives.

There were significantly more children of volunteers who responded than any other type of relative and of those more were sons than daughters. This was because more

questionnaires were sent out to children as they were the easiest relations to contact. Where veterans were the means of introduction they automatically gave the addresses of their offspring. Proportionately more questionnaires were sent to the sons of Brigaders that were part of the random method of contact. **Table 0b** shows the number of different kinds of relatives with their average age.

Table 0b

Average Age of Respondents

Relationship	Number	Average Age
Son	16	57 years
Daughter	7	53 years
Wife ⁵²	5	77 years
Brother	3	81 years
Other	3	73 years
Grandchild	2	41 years
Sister	2	77 years
Husband	1	80 years
Total	39	Average 60 years

Source: The questionnaires.

The average ages within each group illustrate the advanced years of the veterans themselves. Siblings interviewed were all younger than the volunteer. The average age of the wives show that several were considerably younger than their husbands, the majority of whom married after the civil war. The high average of the age of grandchildren was increased by a 49 year old whose grandfather was in his late thirties when he volunteered. This further illustrates the vast age range of the volunteers from as young as seventeen to sixty-two years.

⁵² One wife was also the sister of a Brigader.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire (**Appendix One**) was designed specifically to obtain factual information about the relative and veteran in addition to inviting them to write about how they felt on certain issues. This approach was thought less intrusive than expecting them to write solely about how they felt and encouraged them to complete the questionnaire.

The first six questions, 'About your relative who took part,' gave an idea of how well they were acquainted with the factual details of their relatives' involvement. Exact knowledge of age, rank and the battles fought in, implies they have shown at least a passing interest. Question 5, 'How did your relative express him/herself about their experience', was important because it gave an indication of how much of an oral presence the war was within the family home. The question gave choices as to how often the Brigader spoke about Spain.

Section B, 'About Yourself,' provided a background on the respondent, including age which was useful in terms of locating the generation they were brought up in and whether they were around when their relative left for Spain. Asking them if they actively looked to collect items of memorabilia helped to evaluate whether there was an active interest in the war. This idea was taken a stage further by asking, 'Are you involved or active in associations connected with the Spanish Civil War/International Brigade?' It determined if their interest was expressed publicly, particularly with the Friends organisation. 'How they learnt about their relatives' involvement,' (Q8) probes where the experience of their association with the war began. This will certainly be one of their earliest memories of Spain and the beginning of all the stories they relate and an example of the richness of oral testimony. The words in Question 9 asking them to sum up the International Brigaders' involvement were chosen to reflect some of the labels given to Brigaders over the years from different perspectives. These included, 'Brave,' 'Heroic,' 'Incredible,' and 'Necessary.' The word 'Normal' was linked to include those who did not see Spain as any different to other wars or political experiences. Individually they were illuminating, particularly when examined in conjunction with the rest of the questionnaire and an interview. However, the response must be treated with caution and where possible needed to be contextualised within the entirety of an interview. Several outside sources were

asked to comment on the questionnaire layout and content. Most appeared concerned by some of the terms used in this question especially, 'foolhardy,' and 'misguided,' believing they should be phrased more euphemistically, an indication of how sensitive an issue the representation of the Brigaders has become and the reticence to investigate alternative and oppositional memory models.

In asking the respondents whether they had visited Spain (Q.10) the questionnaire enquires after the physical effort made by relations and the need to put the veterans' involvement into some perspective, or the curiosity and need to be able to visualise the well-known places they had fought at. Political involvement is assessed by, 'Have you been actively involved in any political movements?' listing 'Trade Unions,' 'Pressure Groups,' 'Demonstrations' and any others, useful statistically because even if Spain were not a direct influence, it would certainly have had some impact on the next political generation. 'Have you ever written/contributed to any work (books/films etc.) on the Spanish Civil War/International Brigade?' recorded the literature written by the families about the Spanish Civil War and extended the bibliography attaching importance to the work of the families.

The third section of the questionnaire entitled, 'The Memory of the War,' asks three questions on public aspects of civil war remembrance. The first requires relatives to list the extent of their collection of memorabilia passed onto them by the veteran. I suspect that this has been completed more as a list of the items they have collected themselves. The authors and film director listed in the second question, George Orwell, Laurie Lee, Ernest Hemingway and Ken Loach, were chosen deliberately as ones that have stimulated the most debate and controversy. Having been asked whether they had read or seen any of the above, many felt the need to add further comments, illustrating the strength of feeling attached to these representations. The final question of this section (Q.15) about visiting memorials again deals with the extent of the public memory and how involved relatives are in openly expressing their interest and being a part of the official commemoration of the war.

The last section of the questionnaire, 'The Memory of the Spanish Civil War in your life,' is concerned with the memory of the civil war in the lives of the relatives. The three questions, numbered 16 to 18, are open questions giving the respondent the opportunity to write about the context of the war in modern history and

contemporaneous issues that can be interpreted publicly or privately. ‘How would you describe the place of the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade in British History?’ ‘How much of the Spanish Civil War do you consider is still alive?’ The phrasing of the latter confused some people and finally, ‘How would you propose to develop or keep the memory of the war still alive?’ This gives an impression of the relatives’ priorities and how they view the war and their place within its memory. The final three questions give a limited choice for respondents whether to agree or disagree in varying degrees’ although there is the option of ‘No Opinion’. Despite the aim of gauging opinions on contemporary issues of remembrance, such as the offer of Spanish citizenship, or inclusion at the Remembrance Sunday service, their responses were rarely sought at interviews. It was sufficient to know whether they agreed or did not with the statements.

The questionnaires were also valuable in providing a solid foundation for building up interview questions. It enabled a more direct and structured approach to the enquiry such as, ‘why are you politically active?’ ‘What made you write about your relative?’ ‘Why did you go to Spain to visit the battlefields and how did it make you feel?’ without having to find out that they had done these things first. If a less structured and free-forming style of interview was chosen, ‘can you tell me about your background?’ or ‘can you tell me how you first found out about your relative’s involvement?’ as a first question, the opportunity was given to compare with information already given on the questionnaire. It also gave structure even to the less rigid style of interview because the interviewer was more aware of points of interest.

The Interviews

In terms of structuring and analysing the twenty-four testimonies there were no in-depth case studies of certain respondents. Instead common themes of experience were examined. Yet analysing the transcripts of the relatives of volunteers has been particularly daunting. In addition to the usual criticisms of oral history, the peculiarity of the project with its connection to private memory, could lead to an unsympathetic analysis of the feelings expressed or the uncovering of emotions that may have caused an opening or reopening of uncomfortable memories. However, attempts were made to safeguard against this happening by asking family members

to clarify how they felt about issues that appeared unclear. Also the style of interviewing used in many of the meetings favoured a more free-forming approach that enabled them to talk about what was important to them revealing what they wished to leave out.⁵³

In the early phase of the research, interviews were far more structured, certainly because of the desire to discuss all the details mentioned on the questionnaire. This resulted in excess of twenty questions that respondents would often answer in the course of their conversations without being asked. With growing knowledge of the subject and confidence in the position of interviewer the less structured approach was adopted with equally informative results. Questioning was concentrated around the broad themes of the research, the private and public memory and the effect on the family. This allowed the respondents to include and develop their own individual approach to these areas if they wished to. As mentioned above some interviews could last up to three hours or more but the average length was approximately two hours.

The aim of each interview was to collect a 'statement of memory,' - a highly individualised transcript of their subjective responses to the public and private memory of the war and how this has affected their life individually and within the family. They have been called 'statements' because they are a record of what the relative wished to reveal, in effect, their own set of truths.

The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is often a problematic one. Where possible the aim was to build at least one contact after the questionnaire was returned but only if an interview was granted. This usually took the form of a thank-you letter and an indication of when the interview was likely to take place. In a few instances a close relationship had built up through regular correspondence particularly if an interview had been delayed by several months. This was especially the case with Susie, Martha and Harold. These interviews were informal and very productive. Of course the interviewer was still very much a stranger to the respondents, going into their homes and asking them to talk about their private lives.

⁵³ All interviewees remain anonymous and are given a pseudonym. Veterans interviewed are given by their real name except where they have asked information to be kept anonymous, or their real name could reveal the identity of a relative, in which case they are also given a pseudonym. Other names that appear in full have already appeared in print such as existing interviews in the Imperial War Museum sound collection.

However, the majority have spoken at length and it is believed this was partly because they were given the opportunity to talk in their own right rather than as a spokesperson for their veteran relative.

The criticisms associated with oral history can be overcome very easily with this methodological approach. The looking at the past through 'rose coloured spectacles,' identified, for example, in Tom Harrisson's retrospective testimonies of the Blitz ⁵⁴ does not cause a problem with this study. The construction of legendary figures such as the International Brigade in the memory and a nostalgic reading of the past that conjures reconstruction of a reality / semi-reality or false state of mind are of particular interest. Thus how much do the relatives particularly the younger children who are not of the Spanish Civil War generation subscribe to these images and to what degree? The discrepancies in second hand recollection only infringe where veterans are being asked about their parents' reactions. The testimonies of siblings, partners and children are about their own involvement in the public memory, feelings about their upbringing, their own private thought and so it is their first-hand experience. Second-hand information, such as anecdotes are of interest because of what they were told, how the story was related and how they responded to it. Some relatives were deeply affected by the stories told by volunteers.

Another final point of interest in oral testimonies is what respondents miss out. Luisa Passerini states, "[t]here is no work of memory without a corresponding work of forgetting"⁵⁵ or omission. During several interviews there was a deep impression that the subject was holding back. This could be a purely subjective response on the part of the interviewer to a difficult interview. However, it is a perfectly understandable mode of behaviour for the respondent. One example was an interview with a relative who had lost a parent in Spain whilst a young child. Earlier writings by the subject had indicated the depth of their loss but in the interview situation emotional issues were avoided. Another respondent, who had also lost a loved one in Spain, was keen to expound the myths that surrounded the Brigade. He was reticent about the reactions of his parents at the time of the conflict. Surviving letters are testimony to

⁵⁴ Tom Harrisson book *Living Through the Blitz*, Collins, 1976, showed through the Mass Observation diaries that the recollections of people forty years after the event were very different from what they recorded during the Blitz.

⁵⁵ L. Passerini, "Memory," *History Workshop Journal*, 15, 1983, p.196.

their worry for their son. The latter example was perhaps the most interesting because omission or avoidance was employed to uphold a myth. Whereas the former example was the understandable response to the unnatural interview situation and a deeply moving and personal aspect of their life.

On miscellaneous matters, with the permission of the respondents, it is hoped that eventually their interview transcripts and questionnaires can be donated to one of the public archives where they can be more widely available for reference. The private letters sent by veterans and family will remain in a private collection.

Finally there are ethical considerations in dealing with an oral project such as this, especially one that probes the private and personal lives of respondents. For this reason the family who take part in the project remain anonymous and are given pseudonyms in the text, encouraging greater openness and participation.

On a few occasions I have been asked if I would like to join the Friends of the International Brigade (FIB) organisation. For ethical reasons this offer has always been declined in preference for remaining an outside observer of events. In no way was it wished to influence or be seen to influence the organisation and therefore the public commemoration of memory, by participation.

CHAPTER ONE

A LITERARY HERITAGE

The Changing Interpretation of the War

The literature of the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade is a vast one of at least twenty thousand titles.¹ In many respects it continues to reflect public attitudes and perceptions towards the conflict and the volunteers who took part. In other ways the historiography works as a contributory factor in either, shaping these attitudes and perceptions, or prompting veterans to take an opposite view. Some Brigaders have spoken out against what they see as the politically naïve and unrepresentative stance of George Orwell, or the ‘fictitious nature’ of Laurie Lee’s memoirs. This in turn has caused some of their relatives to adopt similar feelings or be more cautious about accepting them as truthful representations of their relatives’ role and the wider political implications.

A bibliography that includes a variety of literature not exclusively on the conflict and the British Battalion but also on the latter’s families is theoretically problematic. Not least because of the dearth of material explicitly connected to the relatives of Brigaders. However, questions such as, ‘why is it necessary to understand the relatives’ view of the literature?’ become interesting and important not merely for a new perspective or reading of the texts. They can illustrate historical or political continuity with the opinions of the veterans, or through the transmission of ideals² and combining knowledge of the literature, an image of the volunteer. In addition are we presented with a significant difference between the vision of the Brigade, compared to the representations of World War One and World War Two veterans? Does the available literature portray the volunteers more as political agitators than fighters? If so, could this correspond to the traditional image of the Brigader that has been constructed through the literature (especially memoirs), as a very different kind of warrior to state sponsored fighters?

¹ Paul Preston writes that “[w]hen last counted in the 1970’s there were 15,000 books and pamphlets on the war,” in all languages. *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, Fontana Press, 1996, p.229. With renewed interest in the civil war and International Brigade, the total I have quoted may be a conservative estimate.

² ‘Ideals’ refer to the image of the veterans, perhaps as heroic fighter for freedom or as a political role model.

How influential has the official history been in the image-making process of the volunteers? What is their 'ideal' Brigader? The 'official' attitude to published work represented, until July 2000, by Bill Alexander's International Brigade Association (IBA) was especially interesting. His essays and articles³ on a variety of literary forms such as Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, Laurie Lee's *A Moment of War*,⁴ and Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*⁵ have attempted to influence, not only opinion but dictate the wrong and right way of remembering the British Battalion. This is not only an attempt to keep a pristine political image of the Communist Party in Spain but also the reputation of the volunteer fighter. Hence any references to drunkenness or disillusionment have been played down. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) contingent have been in turn both ignored and criticised because of its inactive role in Spain⁶ and association with the POUM militia.

The final important aspect is how far the historiography takes account of the British Battalion in their private environment. This section will be considerably shorter because of the quantitative shortfall of literature that discusses or involves the relatives of British volunteers. Both academic and autobiographical texts on the British Brigaders appear to centre on the public discourse of politics and the war and the experience of the veterans.

The literature consulted is limited to important and seminal texts produced in the English language or translated into English. However, the content of the bibliography is problematic, due to the variety of literary forms used. These include the historical and academic, poetry, film, fiction, memoir, biography, plays and popular song. This offers challenges how best to approach the diversity of its content in terms of structure and analysis. The best structural approach that includes all of the points discussed above was chronologic. It highlights the evolution of the historiography

³ B. Alexander, 'George Orwell and Spain,' C. Norris (Ed.), *Inside the Myth; Orwell: Views from the Left*, 1984.

⁴ *The Spectator*, 'A Not Very Franco Account,' 3 January 1998. L. Lee, *A Moment of War*, Penguin, 1992, (1991).

⁵ *Morning Star*, 'Ken Loach's film about the Spanish Civil War, *Land & Freedom* is frustratingly inaccurate says IBA Secretary,' 7 October 1995.

⁶ For example, there was no mention of the ILP in Bill Alexander's official history, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982.

from an ideological focus on the war to the predominance of the position of the British volunteers in the context of fighters in Britain.

Certainly the literature of the first period of four quite definitive time-spans – the war years of 1936 – 39 was a highly ideological, both collective and individual reaction to events in Spain. The work that emerged from this short space of time was highly charged emotionally and politically and, because of this often subjective.

The second period that followed the Second World War up to 1960 can be entitled ‘The Lost War’ in terms of British literature. Firstly, Spain was eclipsed by the Hitler war and then conveniently forgotten about in terms of its Communist connections by the onset of the Cold War. This is reflected by the quantitative weakness in material about the Brigades and Spain.⁷ Whilst a few ex-Brigaders wrote short memoirs, published at their own expense or by small publishing houses, very little happened of a literary and academic nature.

From 1960 to Franco’s death in 1975, renewed interest in the conflict was fired by Hugh Thomas’ seminal work, *The Spanish Civil War*,⁸ a book that caused problems for some of the Brigaders, including Bill Alexander.⁹ Thomas’ portrayal of the International Brigade was not particularly complementary but it became the definitive academic work on Spain. Both of these periods between 1939 and 1975 show that on the whole the literature was at the mercy of the political climate and did not influence it in any way.

The explosion of literature and to a lesser extent film and television occurred after Franco’s death. This coincided with a greater public curiosity in the British Brigade veterans, with numerous memorials being erected, anniversary commemorations and consequently the emergence of a cultural remembering of the civil war and the Brigades.¹⁰ Certainly 1975/6 to the present day has been in literary terms the period that has produced the broadest variety of works. In the last two decades the British

⁷ For example the Select Bibliography in Bill Alexander’s official history lists only Gerald Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962, (1943), under general titles.

⁸ H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, Penguin Books, 1990, (1961).

⁹ “This widely read book should be studied with caution. The author does not see the war in the context of the general struggle against fascism, and is unsympathetic to the Republican cause.” *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.282.

¹⁰ See Chapter Two: The Heritage of the British Battalion.

involvement has symbolically become known as the last 'Romantic' war in the absence of any other event that inspired such a response.

Numerous areas of the historiography have been examined which include; the military, social, economic and political aspects of the civil war, foreign intervention and non-intervention, histories of the Brigades of most of the countries from which they travelled, biographies of prominent characters from Franco through the political spectrum to La Pasionaria, memoirs from Brigaders and oral history anthologies. Most recently work has been completed on the Franco era in Spain, including political figures, the repression and women's experiences.¹¹

However, in spite of the burgeoning of titles on a variety of areas of the Spanish conflict and its aftermath and the British Battalion, the quantitative weakness of the bibliography in any way related to the family of veterans is significant.

Reading and Writing Myths

The examination of the literature in Britain produced throughout the civil war, with special reference to its impact on the relatives in the sample, revealed that the most enduring and influential were not necessarily the most liked and respected texts by both veterans and their relations. Therefore addressing the importance of understanding the place of the thirty-seven family members in the sample within the context of the vast literature became more than reproducing their responses. Although relevant, a qualitative and quantitative analysis also revealed the extent to which an historical continuity existed. This occurred where the sample of relatives appreciated the importance attached to the British Battalion or, for example, where they agreed with the positive role of the Communist Party. This then presented the bibliography of the civil war and particularly the British Battalion as one of mediums through which myth and political allegiance continued.

Certainly the literature that appeared as a consequence of the Spanish Civil War years has done very little to disentangle myth from reality. In many ways it contributed greatly to a romantic and heroic depiction of Spain, its people and the

¹¹ A few examples of these are, P. Preston, *Comrades*, Harper Collins, 1999. M. Richards, *A Time of Silence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, G. Howson, *Arms for Spain: The Untold Story of the Spanish Civil War*, John Murray, 1998 and S. Mangini, *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1995.

volunteers. This was especially true of much of the poetry. Auden's 'Spain' for example builds to a slow but burning crescendo, evoking Spain's history with meaningful and symbolic phrases, 'The trial of heretics among the columns of stone,'¹² and continually draws the reader to the all important 'present' through the repetition of the line, 'but today the struggle.'¹³ It is significant that Auden's poem 'Spain' is not read today at gatherings to remember the Brigade, despite being steeped in the romantic language of the struggle that veterans identify with. A possible reason may be due to the verse being divorced from the reality of life for many of the veterans who were working-class. They may feel that the 'traditionally romantic' feel of the poem says little about their experiences of the war.

To-morrow for the young poets exploding like bombs,
The walks by the lake, the weeks of perfect communion;
To-morrow the bicycle races
Through the suburbs on summer evenings.
But to-day the struggle.¹⁴

Auden was also not directly involved in the civil war unlike John Cornford. The poetry of Cornford carries with it a poignancy because of his death, at the age of twenty-one, at Córdoba.¹⁵ Cornford a committed Communist was *not haunted by the* disillusionment Stephen Spender later felt. He has been more easily identified with because although an intellectual his poetry is less abstract. Emotively Cornford was also directly involved in the conflict.

This is a quiet sector of a quiet front...
But when they shelled *the other end of the village*...
Women came screaming out of the crumbling houses,
Clutched under one arm the naked rump of an infant.

¹² R. Skelton, (ed.) *Poetry of the Thirties*, Penguin Books, 1964, p.133. 'Spain,' by W.H. Auden, line 13.

¹³ 'Spain,' *ibid.*, p.133 – 136. Repeated every fourth line from line 16.

¹⁴ 'Spain,' lines 85 –88, *ibid.*, p.136.

¹⁵ There are several references for this, *ibid.*, p.290 giving the date of John Cornford as lived 1915-36. Reference for place of death, B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.265.

I thought: how ugly fear is.¹⁶

This results in Cornford being talked of with real affection by some of the people interviewed and is one of the few British intellectuals of the Spanish Civil War to be spoken of in such terms.¹⁷ It has to be related to his death in Spain. Cornford showed his dedication to the cause by making the ultimate sacrifice.

Another poet highly thought of is the little known Randall Swingler who very early on in the conflict wrote the poem, 'From Spain,'¹⁸ which for some grasps the true nature of the struggle as that of a defensive war against barbarity.

Comrades, why do you not understand?
We are the last line between you and tyranny
If we should fall, France falls, and then
You are alone...¹⁹

This line of thought has been widely reproduced by many of the people in the sample who are either politically active or concerned with remembering their relatives' involvement.²⁰ Interestingly Swingler's work does not appear in Cunningham's edition of *Spanish Front: Writers of the Spanish Civil War*.²¹ The introduction to Cunningham's anthology is not favourably looked upon by some of the families who were interviewed. Phrases such as, "...and nothing, not even the intervention of the darker proponents of Soviet cultural imperialism, can detract from the starkness of the fact..."²² would have concerned former members of the Communist Party or New Communist Party.

¹⁶ R. Skelton, (ed.) *Poetry of the Thirties*, p.151-152. 'A Letter from Aragon,' by John Cornford, lines 10 – 16.

¹⁷ Informal conversations held with Martha and Dora at the Spanish Civil War Summer School at Wedgwood Memorial College, July 1999.

¹⁸ 'From Spain' was written in October 1936. Randall Swingler was a member of the Communist Party. This poem was reproduced onto a sheet handed out at the Spanish Civil War workshop, July 1999, with only the aforementioned details.

¹⁹ R. Swingler, 'From Spain,' lines 32-35. Copy of the poem handed out by Andy Croft at the Spanish Civil War Summer School, Wedgwood Memorial College, July 1999.

²⁰ Agreement with Randall Swingler's political stance in the poem was widely shown by some of the relatives who attended the Spanish Civil War Summer School, during discussions of the poem.

²¹ V. Cunningham, *Spanish Front: Writers of the Spanish Civil War*, Penguin Books, 1986.

²² *ibid.*, p.xxii.

British fiction on the Spanish Civil War and the British volunteers written in the war period is small. During our conversations relatives of the Brigaders did not mention works by Graham Greene, or T. C. Worsley.²³ In discussion it was thought most authors romanticised the war. However, one wife in her eighties said she always found it interesting when she read a novel where it ended with someone going off to Spain.²⁴

Graham Greene's *The Confidential Agent*, a short novel known as an 'entertainment' is the most ingenious of the Spanish Civil War novels of this period. Whilst talking to people from the sample none mentioned this novel, written by the critically acclaimed and well-known twentieth century author. The story was also made into a 1948 film and is devoid of the 'romance' of the ideological struggle as for example Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.²⁵ Those unfamiliar with the Spanish Civil War may not even be aware that the novel's backdrop is Spain. An imaginative plot follows Agent D, a Spaniard, through his quirky observations of English and London life operating in a world painfully different to the one he left behind.

They pulled in and out of Piccadilly and he sat tense as
they waved again into the tunnel. It was the same sound
that reached you blowing back from where a high-explosive
bomb had fallen, a wind of death and the noise of pain.²⁶

Always the 'infection' of war pervades his actions and his thoughts, "She said, 'How did your wife die?' but he was determined to keep the conversation free from the infection of his war."²⁷ Greene uses both traditional and more uncomfortable symbols to represent images both of the civil war and pre-Second World War society

²³ G. Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, Penguin, 1992, (1939) and T. C. Worsley, *The Fellow Travellers*, Gay Modern Classics, 1984, (1971). One exception was Ray who disagreed that there were few words of fiction on the civil war. He showed me numerous titles from his vast collection, however, these had been written over all four periods. Alexander Cordall, *To Slay the Dream*, 1980, Christian Murciaux, *The Unforsaken*, 1958, Alan E. Fisher, *Madrid! Madrid!*, 1980, Michael Barratt, *The Flags of Nada*, 1973, Paul Leaf, *Comrades*, 1987, Sidney Sheldon, *The Sands of Time*, 1983. Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999. I did not ask relatives why they were uninterested in these texts as concentration was put on the controversial texts. Presumably some were unaware they existed. Others would be put off by the content that was suggested by the response at the Summer School.

²⁴ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

²⁵ E. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Vintage, 1999, (1941).

²⁶ G. Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, 1992, p.265.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.245.

in England. In a more traditional vein are the literary representations of the Spanish people.

He said, 'You've chosen some line of action and live by it.
Otherwise nothing matters at all. You probably end with
a gas oven. I've chosen certain people who've had the lean
portion for some centuries now.'²⁸

The Confidential Agent is also about the nobility of siding with the oppressed, about making moral decisions and sticking to them despite the dangers to your own life. His depiction of the Midlands mining community is original, not because it didn't exist but that it is represented in a novel about Spain - an apathetic, suspicious place, enlivened by news that the pit could be opening and not perturbed that the coal may be going to the enemies of their kind in Spain. The union boss, still respected in the community, vacillates between work for the villagers or international solidarity. The portrayal devoid of the romance of civil war fiction of this period is not preoccupied with the ideological struggle and the symbolism this usually evokes.

Orwell: An Enduring Challenge to Official Memory

Ironically, one of the few books that has become intrinsically part of the literary memory for Brigaders and their relatives is Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. Of the thirty-seven relatives sampled twenty-two had read the novel. Yet for many it is not a positive representation but one that attacks what the conflict symbolises to them – the struggle for survival of the democratically elected government in Spain against reactionary insurgents and the threat of European wide fascism. Orwell, for many of the volunteers and their relatives misses the point of the civil war completely by discussing the idea of social revolution above the importance of winning the war against the Nationalists. This remains a very controversial view because of the role of the Communist Party during the uprising in Barcelona in May 1937 and the strong association of the International Brigade with the Communist Party. The division between the Communist Party and the POUM is still hotly debated at left-wing

²⁸ G. Greene, *The Confidential Agent*, p.244.

conferences.²⁹ Eight relatives felt sufficiently affected by the book to make strongly negative comments on their questionnaires. Members of the extreme left Socialist Workers Party (SWP) support the POUM version of events, whilst ex-members of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) hold with the official International Brigade Association interpretation. The contemporary relevance of these continued divisions are how they interpret an ideal of the volunteer. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) contingent in Spain was not part of the International Brigade. If the International Brigade is continually associated with the Communist Party, there has to be, for members of the SWP, an element of ambiguity and certain uncomfortable feelings about denigrating the Communist Party.

British reviewers of *Homage to Catalonia*, when it was published in 1938, were keen to broadcast the confused elements of the internal uprising in Barcelona, which the book primarily describes and to use Orwell as evidence for political propaganda. Conservative papers such as the *Tablet* (a Catholic weekly) were keen to have Orwell portrayed as "...an impressive witness, a patently honest man who writes clearly, easily and with a wealth of detail from first-hand experience."³⁰ Whilst for the non-communist left, particularly the Independent Labour Party (ILP), Orwell was a high-profile speaker publicising what they saw as the Soviet Union's counter-revolutionary activities in Spain.

The chapters in which he describes the bitter and unscrupulous attacks made on the POUM amount to the slow unfolding of an unanswerable case, beside which the slanders and abuse which were used sink to their real level of lying propaganda.³¹

The civil war still raged at the time of publication and *Homage to Catalonia* was welcomed as an eyewitness account of a confusing and rumour-laden incident, as well as an objective essay on the tragedy of war. "There is a fine air of classical

²⁹ Conference, 'Marxism at the Millennium: Seven Days of Socialist Ideas and Discussion,' 9- 16 July 1999.

³⁰ Douglas Woodruff's review in *Tablet*, 9 July 1938 in J. Meyers (ed.), *George Orwell: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1975, p.131.

³¹ John McNair's review in *New Leader*, 6 May 1938. *ibid.*, p.125-126.

detachment about his description of war's horrors," wrote the *Manchester Guardian*.³²

The political controversy surrounding the role of the Communists was, however, the most written about aspect in the book's reviews. This changed little with the reprint of *Homage to Catalonia* in 1950, the year of Orwell's death. Nor with the first American edition in 1952. By the time Stephen Spender wrote his review, he had become disillusioned with Communism displayed by his comments on the major events of the novel.

The disaster which Orwell describes was the liquidation of his former militiamen...not by the Fascists, but by the Republicans under the domination of the Communists.³³

His distaste with his former association is made apparent when he presents *Homage to Catalonia* as the meaning of the phrase 'the living truth,' pointing at the irrefutability of Orwell's account of the revolution betrayed. Certainly Spender was right at the time of writing that *Homage to Catalonia* was "...one of the most serious indictments of Communism which has been written."³⁴

There are many reasons why Orwell continues to be a major challenge to the official reading of the Civil War. Bill Alexander, former Secretary of the International Brigade Association (IBA) has shown particular concern about the fact that students were asked to read *Homage to Catalonia* to tell them about the Spanish war.³⁵ Thus Orwell's high profile as a writer, not just about Spain but as an anti-Communist and middle-class intellectual commenting on the working-class in Britain, has thrust *Homage to Catalonia* to the fore-front of British literature on Spain. It remains very much the antithesis of the image put forward by some Brigaders and shared by their relatives. Many stick unerringly to the official history of the veterans' association. One son described how, "the imaginative content overrides the factual."³⁶ Another

³² AWJ review *Manchester Guardian*, 14 June 1938 in J. Meyer, (ed.), *ibid.*, p.130.

³³ Stephen Spender's review in *World Review*, June 1950. *ibid.*, p.135.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.136.

³⁵ Bill Alexander, 'George Orwell and Spain,' in C. Norris (ed.), *Orwell: Views from the Left. Inside the Myth*, 1984, p.85.

³⁶ Questionnaire of John, Question 14.

considers that its “inaccuracy” and the idealism of people (not only Orwell) are unconnected with the day-to-day living of working-class people.³⁷ For those with Communist sympathies the book prompted very strong reactions with some personal attacks on the author. Orwell is presented as a “copper’s nark,”³⁸ and “not a socialist saint but a soured Etonian.”³⁹ On the political message and its anti-Communism, one wife states, “it does a disservice to the memory of the many decent young men and women [who volunteered for Spain].”⁴⁰ Her daughter comments that it was “confused in thinking.”⁴¹ However, there is no unanimity for some relatives of Communist families. It is not so straightforward that Orwell is on the ‘wrong side.’ One daughter had terrific rows with her mother over reading Orwell.

I found it very hard that she and to a lesser extent my father,
felt so strongly that this was rubbish or this was the wrong
interpretation, it wasn’t like that at all and I’m not sure.⁴²

Her indecision and confusion regarding the message of *Homage to Catalonia* is not shared with the veterans who are still sympathetic to the Communist Party and their role in Spain. A veteran told his wife in no uncertain terms, “...don’t read that stuff,”⁴³ when she bought a copy home. Thus the impact of the book on the official ideological interpretation of the war compelled veterans to voice their concerns about the influence it may have on their relatives. Certainly the strength of feeling experienced by some veterans and their families can be linked to Loach’s more recent *Land and Freedom* that closely followed Orwell’s interpretation of events. So it would appear that grievances caused by the book and its message have been reopened.

The endurance of *Homage to Catalonia* as an oppositional and alternative text in the literary and official memory of Spain and the British Battalion is a result of two factors. Firstly, Orwell’s reputation as one of the great literary writers of the

³⁷ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

³⁸ Questionnaire of Joe, Question 14.

³⁹ Questionnaire of James, Question 14.

⁴⁰ Questionnaire of Kitty, Question 14.

⁴¹ Interview with Pam, 15 February 1999.

⁴² Interview with Lydia, 1 December 1998.

⁴³ Interview with Martha, 15 March 1999.

twentieth century, coupled with the popularity of attacking Communist principles in the second half of the last century. This keeps the book in print and institutionalised in terms of teaching about the civil war. As a result the International Brigade Association (IBA) criticises the book. In particular Bill Alexander's attacks guarantee a prominent place for the book in the literary memory of the war, highlighting the rigid official ideological position of the IBA with that of their image of the fighter in Spain.⁴⁴ Orwell never denigrates Brigade members in his account of the war in Barcelona, yet the nature of his interpretation of events implicitly includes the International Brigaders with his criticisms of the Communist Party and Soviet Union. Thus for the orthodox members of the International Brigade Association Orwell represents the antithesis of the volunteer ideal.

A Lost Literary War

In Britain, the twenty years following the end of the Spanish Civil War were from a literary viewpoint the most barren. More than ever political and ideological debates influenced the production of literary, academic and autobiographical work on the civil war and the British section of the International Brigade. This results from external influences associated with the Second World War and the problems for Communists associated with the Cold War period. Anything linked to the Communist Party was avoided or undermined by mainstream literary and cultural circles. There were also cultural struggles within the Party during the Cold War period. The British Communist Party Headquarters at King Street rejected much of the creative expression of its most imaginative artists, in order to protect itself from the Americanisation and embourgeoisement of culture in the 1940's and 1950's.⁴⁵ The rigid adherence to this line not only alienated the artists but also working-class members. However there were many Party activists not wholly independent of King Street, grappling with issues that had a meaning and a purpose in highlighting

⁴⁴ B. Alexander, 'George Orwell and Spain,' C. Norris (Ed.), *Inside the Myth*, 1984.

⁴⁵ The form of cultural imperialism adopted by the Communist Party of Great Britain was called Zhdanovism. A. A. Zhdanov's dubious interpretation of Soviet Realism only succeeded in alienating working-class members of the Party. It was a knee-jerk reaction to the Americanisation and embourgeoisement of culture and became unpopular with the majority of artists who were Communist Party activists for stifling their artistic expression. See Andy Croft, (ed), *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*, Pluto Press, 1998, pages 144, 171 and 193.

continuing working-class struggles. One of these was the monthly newsletter *Spain Today*, published by the IBA, drawing attention to the continuing struggles of the Spanish people.⁴⁶

[*Spain Today*] was edited by Lon Elliot, a former International Brigader then a *Daily Worker* sub-editor. But the real driving force behind the paper was the indomitable secretary of the IBA, Nan Green...Both suggested that I visit Franco's Spain as a tourist and make drawings.⁴⁷

The war was lost, not in the sense of winners and losers of battles but in terms of its popular literary voice. Interest in and reflections on the civil war was relatively quiet, despite the continued activity of the IBA to highlight the repression and atrocities of Franco's victorious regime in Spain. As a consequence there were very few scholastic works during this period. Gerald Brenan wrote *The Spanish Labyrinth* in 1943, one of very few books on Spain to be published during the Second World War. The aim of the book was to present an objective view on the reasons for Spain's descent into internecine conflict. Brenan found this difficult having sided with the republic.⁴⁸ His opinion in the Second Edition, ten years after the end of the war, remained strongly against the Nationalists whose uprising he described as, "folly and wickedness" and needlessly destructive. *The Spanish Labyrinth* remains a popular text among a few of the sample of relatives because of the author's deep affection for Spain and his rich and knowledgeable language of the social, political and cultural aspects of Spanish life.

This book, which I began in order to distract my mind from the horrors and suspense of the Civil War, is simply one for proof of the deep and lasting impression which Spain makes on those who know her.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Paul Hogarth, 'Afterword,' in Andy Croft (ed), *A Weapon in the Struggle*, 1998, pp.207-208.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

⁴⁸ G. Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, 1962, Preface to the Second Edition, p.vii.

⁴⁹ G. Brenan, *The Spanish Labyrinth*, Preface to First Edition (1943) in the Second Edition, 1962, p.ix-xviii.

Some of the relatives in the sample would readily identify and share Brennan's sentiments of deep affection for Spain, its people and culture.⁵⁰

The only prominent work of fiction of this period was Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.⁵¹ Hemingway was in Spain during the war collecting material and collaborating with fellow Communist and Dutch film director Joris Ivens on the documentary film *Spanish Earth*. The novel depicted many of the observations he had made of the social and political situation in Spain. It caused much controversy among Communist Party officials and ex-Brigaders for its representation of the French Communist Andre Marty,

“He may be a glory and all,...[b]ut he is crazy as a bed-bug. He has a mania for shooting people’...’That one kills more than the bubonic plague...But he doesn’t kill fascists like we do...He kills rare things. Trotskyites. Divagationers. Any type of rare beasts.’”⁵²

Although many within the Party were aware of the dangerous character of Marty and the unpredictability and irrationality of his actions voicing these concerns became an affront to the Party itself. In spite of Hemingway's rocky relationship with the American Communist Party, the novel is as popular in terms of its readership as *Homage to Catalonia*. Twenty-two respondents out of thirty-seven, in our sample, had read *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The book is also less problematic and contentious for the relatives spoken to for two reasons. Firstly, although Hemingway is cynical about the Party, its behaviour was justified by the extreme conditions of war. He writes through his main character,

He had not liked Gaylords, the hotel in Madrid the Russians had taken over...because it seemed too luxurious and the food was too good for a besieged city and the talk too cynical for a war. But I corrupted very easily...Why should you not have as good food as could be organised when you came back from

⁵⁰ Informal conversations with Dora and Martha and interview with John, 6 July 1998.

⁵¹ E. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Heritage, 1999, (1941).

⁵² *ibid.*, p.447.

something like this? And the talk that he had thought as
cynicism...it had turned out to be much too true.⁵³

And,

The Comintern had educated them there. In a revolution
you could not admit to outsiders who helped you nor that
anyone knew more than he was supposed to know... if a
thing was right fundamentally the lying was not supposed
to matter.⁵⁴

Secondly, the book does not centre on the International Brigade but a group of
partisans (albeit connected to the Communist Party) hiding out in the mountains and
planning to blow up a bridge. The plot construction complete with romantic narrative
is responsible for the overwhelming consensus among our group that Hemingway's
rendition of the civil war was 'romantic.' Hemingway must have felt suitably
qualified to write about the conflict. He had previously co-written with Joris Ivens
the script for the propaganda documentary *Spanish Earth* after spending time in
battle front situations. However the word 'romantic' features often when relatives
comment on *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, particularly those who remain sympathetic to
the Communist Party. "Romancing,"⁵⁵ "romantic but truer than George [Orwell] or
Ken [Loach],"⁵⁶ "often overrides the factual."⁵⁷ Even for those less political, the
book lacks the reality passed down to them by veterans.

When comparing the book to my father's recollections I feel the book
skims over the top and does not fully portray the horrors of war and
how desperate the struggle was.⁵⁸

These comments suggest that even in fiction a true picture of the 'reality' of war is
sought. However, the meanings and memories you often attach to a book or a film in

⁵³ E. Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, 1999, p. 243-244.

⁵⁴ E. Hemingway, *ibid.*, 1999, p.244-245.

⁵⁵ Questionnaire of James, Question 14.

⁵⁶ Questionnaire of Joe, Question 14.

⁵⁷ Questionnaire of Kitty, Question 14.

⁵⁸ Questionnaire of GGq, Question 14.

childhood can remain strong. The wife of a Brigader recalled how she thought *For Whom the Bell Tolls* "...was wonderful," when she read it in her teens, long before meeting her veteran husband. Although she does not mention the word 'romantic,' obviously this element continues to appeal to her in spite of her husband who sees the book as idealistic.

It was a story not a fact and he didn't feel that these
things happen in true life...I enjoyed the book. I saw
the film as well years and years ago. I loved the film
because there was a favourite film star of mine. (laughs)
I didn't realise what the connection was with Spain
properly, I was very naïve and totally apolitical.⁵⁹

The twenty-year period between 1940 and 1960 in the British historiography of the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade was characterised by the eclipse of political events over literary production. The foresight of the volunteers in predicting a European wide conflict was swiftly replaced at the end of the Hitler hostilities with ideological isolation at the height of the Cold War. Neither development was conducive to a quantitatively extensive output. The implications and impact of World War Two were far more significant and widespread. The attitudes towards communism did not invite positive associations with the Party. Memoirs critical of the Communist Party of Great Britain such as Tom Wintringham's *English Captain*,⁶⁰ Charlotte Haldane's *Truth Will Out*⁶¹ and Fred Copeman's *Reason in Revolt*,⁶² were more readily published. These memoirs are not highlighted in discussions with relatives interviewed. They had been out of print for at least thirty-five years, although enthusiastic collector Ray possesses copies. Availability was not the only reason why they had little impact. Due to their services towards the Spanish Republic, Wintringham and Copeman both briefly as Commanders and Haldane on recruitment and Dependants' Aid are still highly respected among many relatives and ex-Brigaders. Therefore, in spite of their ex-communism, they are not chided in Bill

⁵⁹ Interview with Jean, 23 June 1998.

⁶⁰ T. Wintringham, *English Captain*, Faber and Faber, 1939.

⁶¹ C. Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1949.

⁶² F. Copeman, *Reason in Revolt*, Brandford Press Ltd., 1948.

Alexander's official bibliography of the Brigade.⁶³ In addition to the above the repressive atmosphere in the years after the conflict inside Spain made it especially difficult to produce work although not impossible.

Ambiguous Interpretations of the Brigade and the Popularisation of the War

By 1960 Franco's regime had an air of permanency about it but this did not prevent the IBA continuing with their campaign to expose the injustices of his dictatorship. The most publicised was the barbarous treatment of returned Communist exile Garcia Grima to Spain in 1962.⁶⁴ Franco felt it necessary to keep alive the divisions that the civil war had disastrously brought out into the open.⁶⁵ Although the democratic international community ostracised Spain in the forties as a fascist state, she was encouraged to drop the economic autarky of the period by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. This opened up Spain to foreign trade and investment.⁶⁶ It also saw the popularisation of Spain as a tourist destination that boosted their industrial take-off.⁶⁷ The eastern and southern coast became an affordable and exotic holiday destination for working-class families in the 1960's, many of whom had no or little memory of the Spanish conflict. Those volunteers whom had married during or after the Second World War now had children in their teens or young adults, often embarking on their own discovery of their family history. A couple of the British middle-class families surveyed who could afford to travel abroad returned to holiday on mainland Spain as early as the late 1950's. So a situation had arisen where there were International Brigade sponsored observers travelling to Spain to monitor abuses in human rights and British families taking holidays in the sun oblivious to the darker sides of Franco's dictatorship.

A similar duality exists in the variety of literary production during this period. One side was represented by a renewed, popular interest in the Spanish Civil War initiated by Hugh Thomas' meticulously detailed account in 1961. On the other, a

⁶³ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, pp. 277 – 282.

⁶⁴ B. Alexander discusses this instance of Franco's 'magnanimity' in *ibid.*, p.253.

⁶⁵ R. Carr and J. P. Fusi, *Spain: Dictatorship to Democracy*, Harper Collins. 1981, p.19.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.54.

⁶⁷ Carr states tourism began as a 'trickle' in the 1950's and by 1973 thirty million tourists visited Spain annually, *ibid.*, p.57.

fairly disparate treatment of the British Battalion represented by obscure memoirs read by few people outside of veterans and family, or specifically interested individuals and a varied assortment of academic accounts of the British Brigades, some serious and well-researched, others seen as flawed.⁶⁸ However, it is Thomas' hugely popular work at the beginning of this period that eclipsed other shorter, less detailed publications. What exists collectively of this period gives a confusing depiction of the British Brigade. However, none of these could parallel Thomas, 'The Spanish Civil War', in terms of popularity, sales and publicity. Yet only two relatives out of thirty-seven responses had read it. Possible reasons for this may have been its length, at over nine hundred pages long, more influential than Bill Alexander's official judgement of it. *The Spanish Civil War* also approaches its subject scientifically, concentrating with meticulous detail on military aspects of the war. Very little space is given to the International Brigade.

Thomas commented fifteen years after its initial publication that the book was a much-needed study.⁶⁹ He states that during the fifties the subject was still taboo in Spain but passions had cooled sufficiently among those who had fought in the war to justify writing an objective study.⁷⁰ He suggests that this 'healing process' had come about slowly during the 1960's and 1970's with renewed prosperity and the maturity of a generation who had not experienced the war. He somewhat underestimates the power of story telling within the family. For however objectively Thomas believed he was writing, the *Spanish Civil War* was not received objectively. In Spain, where the book was smuggled in during the 1960's, it was hugely popular⁷¹ although it had to be sold under the counter. With hindsight Thomas writes in the Preface to the Second (updated) Edition in 1976, which coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the war and the more relaxed market in Spain after Franco's death, that the book sought to avoid polemic, so that history could be approached calmly,⁷² something

⁶⁸ For example, Bill Alexander called Vincent Brome's *The International Brigade*, published by Heinemann in 1965 as, "A superficial, inaccurate attempt at a history," *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.280.

⁶⁹ H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1990, p.xiv.

⁷⁰ Thomas discussed the 'cooling of passions' in the 1976 Second edition of *The Spanish Civil War* around the time of Franco's death.

⁷¹ Thomas, *ibid.*, p. xiv-xv.

⁷² H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1990, p.xiv.

perhaps not entirely possible with the Spanish Civil War. It is interesting that Thomas changes his judgements on both left and right politics between the First and Third Editions. He became concerned with the issue of responsibility for the war and the significance of intervention. What events in the historiography of the war had prompted what he called his “angle of vision” to change? Thomas says that he became harder on the socialist youth in dealing with the months before the war and harsher on the victor’s lack of magnanimity after the war. Franco actively kept alive the divisions fought over during the conflict. Objective studies of the war were not sanctioned. All histories were vetted by the Ministry of Information and told a one-sided account of the ‘Nationalist Crusade’ to save Spain from the ‘Red Hordes.’

In Britain the interpretation of the role and conduct of the International Brigade caused concern among some of the British veterans. The first and revised edition of 1965 describes the British volunteers as desiring some outlet “...through which to purge some private grief or maladjustment.”⁷³ It highlights the problems faced by the Brigades such as drunkenness, disillusionment and desertion and those disgruntled with Communist Party discipline and policy at the front, offering little alternative evidence.

The International Brigade’s volunteers could not choose their moment to withdraw though some did, taking advantage (if they were from anti-fascist or democratic countries) of their leaves to visit their embassies, and sometimes thereby finding the means to escape.⁷⁴

From the start, the wilder volunteers had met difficulties with Communist authorities, if only for drunkenness. But trouble was frequent.⁷⁵

He says of Jarama that the British Battalion put in a “brave performance”⁷⁶ and that “many men were courageous.”⁷⁷ These positive statements are balanced by Thomas’

⁷³ In K. L. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, Stanford University Press, California, 1998, p.368, note 23. This interpretation was omitted from the Preface to the 1986 Reprint.

⁷⁴ H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1990, pp.543-544.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.606.

description of how the volunteers felt after their ninety-day engagement at the Jarama front.

The volunteers had discovered in battle that ‘a war of ideas’ is much like any other conflict. In Spain, as elsewhere, there was confusion of orders, jamming of rifles at the critical moment, uncertainty about the whereabouts of the enemy and of headquarters, desire for cigarettes (or sweet-tasting things), fatigue, and occasional hysteria.⁷⁸

To support these images he quotes a poem written by an unknown British Brigader.⁷⁹ The first verse of the poem reads, “Eyes of men running, falling, screaming, Eyes of men shouting, sweating, bleeding, The eyes of the fearful, those of the sad, The eyes of exhaustion, and those of the mad.” Undoubtedly fear, exhaustion or madness was part of the experience of Jarama for many volunteers and part of a narrative rarely put forward by official sources about the battle. Yet Thomas appears eager to focus on the negative aspects of the engagement over and above more positive elements of the story. In fact less space is dedicated to the International Brigade in subsequent editions.⁸⁰ Communist Bill Alexander criticised Thomas stating that the text should be studied with caution, that Thomas is unsympathetic to the Republican cause and does not interpret the war, “...in the context of the general struggle against Fascism.”⁸¹ The son of a volunteer, James, comes to a similar judgment, “...he wasn’t paying nearly enough attention to the fact that this was an overthrown elected government by a General that was supposed to be defending it.”⁸² Importance is attached to legitimising the war over the false rationale that it was simply an ideological struggle between what were seen as the two big threats to liberal democracy – fascism and communism. In addition to a misrepresentation of the

⁷⁶ H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1990, p.592.

⁷⁷ Thomas quotes the memoirs of Jason Gurney twice here. Several veterans irrespective of their political stance have denigrated Gurney’s account as ‘fanciful’. These included Bernard McKenna, Bill Alexander and Fred Thomas.

⁷⁸ H. Thomas, *ibid.*, 1990, p.606.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.606.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.xiv.

⁸¹ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.282.

⁸² Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

‘official’ interpretation of the nature of the struggle, Thomas miscalculates the subjective power implicit in the reception of the book.

Time helped. So did prosperity, which has made many in Spain forget, or forgive the past.⁸³

A Spanish friend of James took him to an overgrown hidden away memorial in Barcelona erected to commemorate the site of the massacre of thousands of people. He told how every night between 1939 and 1943 the authorities would read out a list of the men to be shot that night. One of those men was his grandfather.⁸⁴ Whilst the condition of the memorial indicates that many in Spain choose to forget or forgive as Thomas suggests, or who find it too painful or embarrassing to remember, for many of the Spaniards who were affected it is important to keep the memory alive within their families. Thus the psychological repercussions of the war are not so easily remedied by ‘time and prosperity.’

Alternatively, for other respondents who are not so identified with, or sympathetic to, the Communist Party Thomas’ work is a thorough and to one “accurate”⁸⁵ account of the military and political aspects of the conflict. Excluding Thomas’ work this period in the civil war historiography was barren, particularly when compared with what followed.

A Literary Explosion: 1975 – 2001

The period after Franco’s death to the present has been characterised by a phenomenal increase in British literature produced on the civil war and the International Brigade. The end of Franco’s regime in 1975 had a liberalising effect, as the archives that remained in Spain were finally opened to historians. This coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the start of the war. In Britain, the International Brigade Association in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum held an event at Stanford Hall, near Loughborough, where the majority of surviving International Brigaders recorded their civil war experiences. These interviews now

⁸³ H. Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, 1990, p.xv.

⁸⁴ Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

⁸⁵ Questionnaire of Mick, Question 14.

make up a large part of the 'Spanish Civil War Collection' at the Museum's Sound Archive. An ever-increasing number of publications written by historians and the veterans examine many aspects of the conflict and the contribution of the Brigades. These have included, the historical, military, memoirs and oral anthologies. The most recent titles continue their fascination with the International Brigade and new perspectives on any aspect of the war. Increased knowledge of the conflict has also spurred on the desire to examine its impact especially the repression that continued after Franco's victory.⁸⁶ However, the implications for the families of Brigaders, or indeed the British veterans themselves, command very little attention. Publications on the British Battalion, either historical or oral based, centre on their service in Spain and end with a reflective chapter on why they left and what volunteering meant to them politically. Their own memoirs, especially of this period, reflect this general pattern.

The shifting focus in the activity of the International Brigade Association to the public image of the British Battalion has meant an increased participation in literary criticism. This leads to the popularisation and sanction of certain civil war authors such as, Paul Preston, Jim Fyrrh and in Wales, Hywel Francis. Others receive less enthusiasm and warmth. The strongest attacks since Orwell have been reserved for Ken Loach, director of the film *Land and Freedom*. These alignments are often continued by relatives but not in all cases. Authors and historians respected by the veterans and their families, write both sympathetically and coherently about the conflict and the Brigade. One son interviewed states that Paul Preston's book *Comrades* has done more for his understanding of the conflict than anything else he remembers reading.⁸⁷ In a review of the publication in the Friends Newsletter he concludes,

One of Paul Preston's most rewarding qualities as an historian is the clarity and immediacy of his writing, which carries the reader throughout the labyrinth of forces which led up to the

⁸⁶ The most recent in the English language are, Shirley Mangini, *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, 1995 and Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence*, 1998.

⁸⁷ Interview with Mark, 27 June 1999.

Civil War, the outcome and its aftermath.⁸⁸

Preston is also highly thought of by many of the veterans and has been invited to speak at reunions and memorial gatherings. This esteem and affection is clearly demonstrated by veteran Sam Russell.

Meanwhile, we are all indebted to our own Professor Paul Preston for producing 'A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War' which is just the fact packed exposition to give a young person seeking an easily read account of what really happened.⁸⁹

The twin elements of clarity in style and an understanding of the position of the International Brigade have made Preston a favourite with the veterans and their relatives. This following extract from one of his many works on the civil war illustrates why he is so popular.

The recruitment of the Republican volunteers was largely organised by the Communist Party. This does not mean that they were all Communists, although a fair proportion of them were. Hindsight about the awful crimes of Stalin... cannot diminish the idealism and heroism of those who sacrificed their comfort, their security and often their lives in the anti-fascist struggle.⁹⁰

The purity of the vision of volunteers as anti-fascists and the strength of their convictions is one of the most important messages that veterans wish to communicate to the next generation hence Sam Russell's unreserved praise of Preston's concise history, for its suitability as a text for the young student.

Another similarly praised and highly regarded author is Jim Fyrth. His work on the Aid Spain Movement, *The Signal Was Spain*⁹¹ has been warmly received. Fyrth

⁸⁸ Friends Newsletter, No. 4, July 1999, p.4.

⁸⁹ IBA Newsletter, January 1998, p.5.

⁹⁰ P. Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.126.

proudly stated that, "...historians, with one or two honourable exceptions who give it a page, have turned one of the most important, seminal movements in modern British history into an 'unhappening.'"⁹² He also writes with great affection for his subject.

For three years, and sometimes longer, some of the best spirits to be found in Britain gave themselves wholeheartedly to the cause of solidarity with the Spanish people, both for reasons of humanity, and because they saw the Spanish cause as that of their own people, indeed as the last hope of saving them from the same fate at the hands of fascist aggression.⁹³

Again the purity of conviction is emphasised. However its popularity with some of the relatives spoken to is not only in the sentiment but that it highlights the involvement of their relatives, or even themselves. James's father features in the book frequently because he was a doctor in Spain, Susie is mentioned for her help in collecting money and food and Martha's husband began the book *shortly before he* died after which Fyrth took over.

Welsh veterans and their families hold Hywel Francis in high esteem due to his sympathetic treatment of the history of the Welsh volunteers. He writes in his publication *Miners Against Fascism*⁹⁴, a book about their own unique working-class experience, that,

It is an account of how ordinary men and women, individually, and collectively through their working-class organisations, starkly identified and interpreted the growth of fascism...in terms of their own bitter experiences in the coalfields of South Wales.⁹⁵

⁹¹ J. Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain: The Aid Spain Movement in Britain, 1936–1939*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1986.

⁹² J. Fyrth, *ibid.*, p.23.

⁹³ J. Fyrth, *ibid.*, p.311.

⁹⁴ H. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1984.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, Preface, p.23.

Francis began interviewing the Welsh volunteers several years before the English veterans' experiences were sought. He again writes with clarity, authority and an understanding of the volunteers' sacrifices and inspirations. He became close to many of the veterans and the Welsh relatives interviewed for this project also admired Francis' work. He is often invited to commemorations in Wales.

Whilst Tom Buchanan is alluded to as a 'diligent historian'⁹⁶ his publication *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*⁹⁷ antagonised Bill Alexander because he used Laurie Lee's book, *A Moment of War*, as evidence for being a part of the International Brigade. Again the importance of transmitting the right image to the next generation is paramount. If the book, *A Moment of War*, is cited as a reliable source in an academic publication then it becomes, "history to be taught to students."⁹⁸

Earlier in his career Jim Fyrth also challenged Buchanan for his interpretation of the Aid Spain Movement. The main thrust of Fyrth's argument was that the responses of the British people were not merely disparate, ad hoc expressions of support but a coherent movement of solidarity for the Spanish people – an Aid Spain Movement which united the many different aid agencies such as the Spanish Medical Aid Committee (SMAC) and the National Joint Committee (NJC). Tom Buchanan challenged this theory in an article for *History Workshop Journal* in 1991,⁹⁹ where he stated that 'Aid Spain' did not exist as a 'political entity' and had no 'institutional basis,' that instead it was a wide range of local and national organisations, uniting activists and progressives in solidarity work.¹⁰⁰ Not surprisingly for the often polemical and controversial subject the academic debate between Fyrth and Buchanan was intense. Fyrth was criticised for not being able to give a clear definition of what was meant by the 'Aid Spain Movement' and failing to contextualise the British response within national labour movement politics. Fyrth's retaliation was both a forceful defence,

⁹⁶ IBA Newsletter, January 1998, p.4.

⁹⁷ T. Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

⁹⁸ M. Eaunde, 'Fighter or Faker,' *The Guardian*, 13 May 1998.

⁹⁹ T. Buchanan, "Britain's Popular Front?: Aid Spain and the British Labour Movement," *History Workshop Journal*, Spring 1991, no. 31, pp. 60-72.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.62.

Tom Buchanan's conclusions are at odds with mine which, unfortunately, he misrepresents...He writes that I made, "no real attempt to prove that Bevin and his colleagues were hostile to the Spanish Republic. Rather that point is suggested and assumed. Of course I didn't try to prove it because they weren't."¹⁰¹

and attack,

One of the problems of Tom Buchanan's book [*The Spanish Civil War and the British Labour Movement*, 1991] is that he generally uses the term 'labour movement' to define a small group of leading institutions and individuals. Since the role of these is his central concern, he sees the whole 'Aid Spain' from their viewpoint, with anything not under the control of the labour movement, thus defined as a competitor. Indeed he seems to think of Aid Spain as something apart from the efforts of the labour movement. This gives a false perspective, and prevents an understanding of the political significance of the movement.¹⁰²

The debate between the two academics seems to have passed the relatives in the sample by. None of them mentioned the articles. Whilst individuals, as mentioned above, spoke with affection of Fyrth's book, none identified or disagreed with Buchanan.

Political Film- Making

However, the most vociferous attacks from the International Brigade Association and some members of their families were for Loach's *Land and Freedom*, based very closely on Orwell's interpretation of events. *Land and Freedom* as historic war film has contentious issues that present problems in viewing and analysis. We expect a lot from the historic film but the honesty required is different by degree, it is a representation of truth or a 'filmic truth.'

¹⁰¹ J. Fyrth, "The Aid Spain Movement in Britain 1936 -1939," in *History Workshop Journal*, Spring 1993, No. 35, pp. 153-164. Quote taken from J. Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, 1986, p.66.

¹⁰² J. Fyrth, *History Workshop Journal*, 1993, p.157.

They [the film-makers] tended to make decisions on the basis not of some notion of written truth...[be this documentary evidence or oral testimony] but of a filmic truth (or belief, or ideology), one which asserts that anything that cannot be explained in images, or which slows the relentless filmic pace of 24 frames a second will destroy some larger truth by boring or losing the audience.¹⁰³

It therefore would appear strange that Jim Allen and Ken Loach chose a particularly inactive part of the front for their subject. If they were looking for a 'larger truth' that does not bore the audience, why not have chosen the Jarama and Brunete campaigns, full of action and incident? Instead they portrayed the relatively quiet Aragon front, the complexity of collectivisation and the internecine fighting between the left in Barcelona. *Land and Freedom* becomes further complicated in its search for a representation of truth by the choice of subject. Essentially it is a political film about a controversial incident provoking debate and discussion sixty years on. Allen and Loach were seeking to represent their own vision of events and by the film's very existence are proving a political point in choosing to cover a rather obscure but politically sensitive incident in the civil war. This is no more evident than its success in polarising the views of veterans and their relatives, causing considerable anger among Communist Party stalwarts and fears that it would have a detrimental effect on the popular memory of the International Brigade. One Brigade veteran protested that he would not want his grandchildren to see the film,¹⁰⁴ implying that the filmic image is stronger than the spoken word and censorship of unwelcome representations in order to prevent their influencing the next generation.

The response of some veterans and their relatives to *Land & Freedom* appeared measured when for example taking some enjoyment from the film's entertaining collectivisation scene. The following responses were co-incidentally from the wives of two veterans.

¹⁰³ P. MacFadden, 'Saturn's Feast, Loach's Spain: *Land and Freedom* as filmed history,' in G. McKnight (ed), *Agent of Challenge and Defiance: the Films of Ken Loach*, Flicks Books, Wilts., 1995, p.147, note. 14.

¹⁰⁴ This phrase has been attributed to Bill Alexander.

I think the bit where they discuss whether to collectivise the land, its brilliant...but I think he should have been more careful. It wasn't fair.¹⁰⁵

I really enjoyed the scene of those anarchists at their meeting and so on.¹⁰⁶

However, the majority were horrified by the film's portrayal of the Communist Party and the unrepresentative choice of story. The husband of one veteran said,

I was astonished to find that even 7 or 8 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union the rush to get on the band wagon to be anti-Communist...It was completely gratuitous...the whole thing was distorted.¹⁰⁷

A son goes further proclaiming *Land & Freedom* as "CIA backed, anti CP,"¹⁰⁸ such was the disgust of Communist Party stalwarts. James felt the film represented, "the precarious use of the Spanish war by all sorts of people, including me, for their own agendas."¹⁰⁹ Loach chose to show case part of the story of the civil war at odds with official history. A view that may well have occurred but firstly is not the well-known interpretation of what the war was about and secondly does not form the representation favoured by many relatives of defeating the fascists before social revolution. His decision to portray an alternative narrative can only be interpreted as highly political.

Yet in spite of Bill Alexander's warning that this was not the correct interpretation to pass onto future generations, the evidence found among the sample does not conclusively prove that veterans had influenced their children in any way about the film, for example, told them not to go and see it and were obeyed. One example on a questionnaire gives their father's opinion of the film and not their own. "My father

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Martha, 15 March 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Alfred, 1 December 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Questionnaire of Joe, Question 14.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

hated *Land and Freedom*.”¹¹⁰ However, on receipt of a more detailed questionnaire he expresses a very individual interpretation of the war showing that he had thought about the film in a way different to his father’s opinion.

Ken Loach’s film...was made with a passionate agenda about the war in Bosnia, he used Spain to highlight the damaging divisions among the left...and it portrayed the disillusion of an International Brigader. None of my parent’s friends that I met appeared disillusioned with their role on the war.¹¹¹

John’s feelings correspond closely with those of his father. “*Land and Freedom* dramatised I think and certainly my father felt that *Land and Freedom* was pretty inaccurate as an account or as a complete account.”¹¹² A significant number had been put off visiting the cinema by what they had heard about the film, particularly those who held strong political views. The fact that veterans had been told to boycott the film by the IBA must also have had some impact. Yet in spite of Lydia’s parents’ strong disgust at the film she had not gone to see it purely because she did not have the time. Almost half of the people who submitted questionnaires (eighteen out of thirty-seven) had seen *Land and Freedom*. On the whole they made up their own minds about the film but were mindful and often in agreement with their parent’s politics and opinions.

In contrast press reviews were unanimous in their praise of *Land and Freedom*, one applauding the film’s political stance.

The film may not be perfect, but at least it’s an outstanding example of polemical filmmaking which still manages to engage one’s sympathy for the individuals.¹¹³

Yet the majority of the reviews firstly give prominence to the film’s worth as a document of war and the little remembered conflict,

¹¹⁰ Questionnaire of Nigel, Question 14.

¹¹¹ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, 17 February 2000.

¹¹² Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

¹¹³ Derek Malcolm, ‘A Winning Battle,’ *The Guardian*, 23 May 1995.

Whether you believe his version of the truth or not, you have to admit after seeing it that the Spanish Civil War was a reverberating part of the story of our century and should be remembered better than it is today.¹¹⁴

Secondly, the importance for all but one of the reviews to place *Land and Freedom* into a wider context, namely the civil war's relevance for today's society. Thus the symbols of the continued struggle, "...the only splash of colour is a NF logo scrawled on the wall. Loach and Allen's message is unmistakable; the struggle continues"¹¹⁵ and the validity of the ideals of the film are signposted for future generations to heed.

The Significance of Reading

Literature of the Spanish Civil War and the British International Brigade plays an important if often contentious part in the construction of a vision of the volunteers for the majority of the sample. Of the twenty-eight people who consented to an interview¹¹⁶, only five indicated that they had read very little on the subject, perhaps only the book(s) left to them by their parent.¹¹⁷ This cannot imply that the war and their parents' participation does not interest them, the simple fact that they wished to be interviewed suggests a degree of involvement. Although not pressed at interview as to the specific reasons, the impression given was that they have learnt or experienced all they needed to know without the aid of books. However, out of the nine respondents who declined an interview, six appear to have read nothing about the civil war or the Brigade. One respondent wrote that she has no interest in the subject.¹¹⁸ The exact reasons for the other respondents were not available. Why read about a subject that holds no interest for you? Or that you want to reject? A wife, now in her late eighties simply wrote that her husband had left in the middle of the night without a word. Perhaps there was no need to read further into the events that

¹¹⁴ Derek Malcolm, 'A Homage to Utopia,' *The Guardian*, 5 October 1995. Again, in the article's title, the ever present *Homage to Catalonia* as symbol for popular remembrance of the civil war.

¹¹⁵ P. Kemp, 'Land and Freedom,' *Sight and Sound*, 51, p.10. Not the P. Kemp who volunteered for the Nationalist side.

¹¹⁶ Twenty-four interviews were eventually carried out.

¹¹⁷ Questionnaires of Kitty, Owen, Janet, Rhodri, Stephen.

¹¹⁸ Questionnaire of EEq.

had taken him away. On his return he never spoke about Spain. The fact that she never read about Spain suggests the subject had already caused her enough grief.¹¹⁹

Political Agitator and Fighter? What does the Literature and Oral History say about the Volunteers.

In order to determine the image of International Brigader as either political agitator or fighter, through literary representations, a wide variety of publications must be examined. These include, in addition to works on the Brigade and their own memoirs, a limited bibliography of the World War, specifically historical, oral, autobiographical and fiction, predominantly from the last twenty-five years.¹²⁰

An examination of the burgeoning historiography on war and memory is the foundation for the literary vision of the warrior. Writing by Paul Fussell, Alistair Thomson, Joanna Bourke and Niall Ferguson give varying depictions of the First World War soldier and become the basis for comparisons with the volunteer Brigaders. The memoirs and oral histories give the opportunity to explore the common ground between the soldier of the world war and that of the Brigader. Oral histories and to a lesser extent memoirs can be products of trends in historical study and popular interest. There is more relevance, however, in examining evidence that sees the Spanish volunteer as political agitator.

The key to determining the dominant vision of the volunteer lies with the link between the Communist Party and the International Brigade. Within the literature the relationship between the two remains close, both statistically in the context of historians making connections between the role of the Communist Party and the Brigades and abstractly through the International Brigade Association's interpretation of official literature.

The final contributory factor to the literary image-making process is the influence of official history. The role of Bill Alexander in his capacity as Secretary of the IBA, until his death in July 2000, was central in the development of the concept of the 'ideal volunteer.' In an attempt to control the literary representations of the Brigaders

¹¹⁹ Questionnaire of IIq.

¹²⁰ The concentration on recent publications (since 1975) is in line with the increase in work on the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade.

to within a very narrow definition Alexander influenced the popular perception of what it was acceptable to write about the British Battalion in Spain.

The study of how twentieth century war remembrance, the literary representation of conflicts and memory have become increasingly popular since Fussell's seminal work, *The Great War and Modern Memory*.¹²¹ The First World War dominates this historiography. Fussell's study discusses the literary and linguistic to the symbolic and through these representations the Great War becomes, "remembered, conventionalised and mythologized." These 'recognition scenes' reveal the ritualistic, superstitious and psychological resonance of the war experience. In one example he describes how the public language of war, in this case the *Daily Mirror* was used to 'euphemise' the loss of 420,000 men, in 1916, after the four-month Somme offensive. The newspaper attempts to draw attention away from the mass slaughter by elevating the Tommies' status as they lay dead on the battlefield. Words, Fussell claimed, as "...rigorous and impenetrable as language and literature skilfully used could make it."¹²² There are many similarities with the Spanish Civil War dead. Relatives were encouraged to focus on the cause for which volunteers died drawing them away from the stark reality of their death.

Subsequent work tends to concentrate on public representations of memory such as literature, film, memorials, and institutional memory in museums and at Armistice Day. However, there are studies of private memory that highlight and reflect strands of the individual conflicts which caused contention. Alistair Thomson's work on the Anzacs¹²³ illustrates how the combatants' private memories are constructed around the public myth of the Australian and New Zealand soldiers' contribution to the First World War. His thesis concludes that for many Anzac veterans public myth has become individual private memory. The various vehicles for the myths that surround the Anzac soldier, film, monument and the veterans' own recollections construct a natural image of the 'digger' as masculine, "...soldier heroes who put nation before

¹²¹ P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975.

¹²² Fussell, *ibid.*, p.175.

¹²³ A. Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Memory Theory into Practice in Australia,' *Oral History Journal*, Vol. 18, 1, Spring 1990, pp.25-32.

class...and physical bravery before moral courage.”¹²⁴ Some of the attributes assigned to the Brigader by official history are actually the opposite of those of the Anzac. The most obvious is that class solidarity is put before nation, moral courage ranks above physical strength, although the latter is accentuated. Jane Leonard in an article on Irish veterans and World War One¹²⁵ discussed the conflict between Irish Republicanism and serving in the British Army and is one of the few articles that include the recollections of families as essential to constructing post-war memory.

Widows and families of veterans were awkward and puzzled when their own recollections revealed the scale of Armistice Day celebrations and the active presence of the British Legion in inter-war Ireland.¹²⁶

However, both studies describe how private memory is controlled by outside public influences further illustrated by Margaretta Jolly’s article¹²⁷ on love letters written under war conditions. The correspondence is set in the context of its display at the Forces’ Sweethearts Exhibition of the Imperial War Museum. The article concentrates on the Museum’s manipulation of the material that celebrates ‘love’ but purposely excludes uncomfortable representations such as divorce, abortion and death. Although Jolly looks briefly at the ‘true-life love stories’ some of the letters tell, the main rationale of the article is not to assess “...these items’ historical value...but their effect on the visitor and the way they work in the exhibition...”¹²⁸

In *The Silence of Memory* Adrian Gregory also examines the influence of public commemoration on the public’s memories of World War One and how Armistice Day has shaped and contested their remembrance. The ritual of commemoration was used as an instrument by the state to promote unity and integration in a period of

¹²⁴ A. Thomson, ‘The Anzac Legend: Exploring National Myth and Memory in Australia,’ in *The Myths We Live By*, R. Samuel and P. Thompson (eds.), Routledge, 1990, p.75.

¹²⁵ J. Leonard, ‘Facing ‘the Finger of Scorn.’ Veterans’ Memories of Ireland after the Great War,’ in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, M. Evans and K. Lunns, (eds.), Berg, Oxford, 1997, pp.59-72.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.61.

¹²⁷ M. Jolly, ‘Love Letters versus Letters Carved in Stone: Gender, Memory and the Forces’ Sweethearts Exhibition,’ in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, 1997, pp.105-121.

¹²⁸ M. Jolly in *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, 1997, p.110.

uncertainty. Therefore it focused on the people that were left. The design of the two-minute silence had the living very much in mind.

The intended subject of the Silence...[was] first, the bereaved, characterised significantly as women; second children for whom the silence was intended to be pedagogic; third, the...veterans... finally, the dead.¹²⁹

Significantly Gregory's premise implies that after the Great War both the state and official commemoration placed the most importance with bereaved relatives. Essentially this involved mainly women, the mothers, widows, sisters and the children. The dual purpose was to acknowledge the catastrophic loss of sons, husbands, brothers and fathers. Therefore relatives became central within the official memory of the conflict during the inter-war period, as the families of the Spanish Civil War veterans have never been.

The most subjective study on the memory of conflict is Geoff Dyer's *The Missing of the Somme*¹³⁰ a moving, personalised evocation of the many representations of the conflict such as memorials, poetry, photographs and paintings in which he seeks to define the conscious and unconscious stream of remembrance. Dyer often comments on the anticipation of memory in a similar way to Fussell in his examination of Thomas Hardy's pre-1914 poetry. Thus Laurence Binyon's 'For the Fallen' written in September 1914 "...before the fallen actually fell...is a work not of remembrance but of anticipation, or more accurately, the anticipation of remembrance,"¹³¹ and how our knowledge of the war's outcome has tainted and prejudiced the way we look at its memorabilia.

...the photographs of men queuing up to enlist seem wounded by the experience that is still to come...The recruits of 1914 have the look of ghosts. They are queuing up to be slaughtered: they are already dead.¹³²

¹²⁹ A. Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, 1994, p.10.

¹³⁰ G. Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, Penguin Books, 1994.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.10.

¹³² *ibid.*, p.37.

The image of the Great War soldier presents a man brave, yet vulnerable, a noble figure sick of the horrors of their situation but without the energy or inclination to want to leave, where the world of the trenches becomes the only 'safe' one they know. It becomes a world of belonging. These representations are predominant in recent war fiction. Yet they are now undergoing revision in the recent work of Niall Ferguson¹³³ and Joanna Bourke.¹³⁴ The latter's work examines the letters, diaries and memoirs of combatants over the two world wars and the Vietnam conflict concluding that men enjoyed killing and were spurred on by revenge.

However, as this book has attempted to emphasise, warfare was as much about the business of sacrificing others as it was about being sacrificed. For many men and women, this was what made it 'a lovely war.'¹³⁵

Bourke also puts forward the idea that their time as soldiers and killers was the most intense and stimulating period of their lives. This corresponds with the feelings of Brigade veterans but for very different reasons. The latter's strong feelings of comradeship and for some identification with the cause they were fighting for ranked higher in their emotions than the 'exhilaration' of killing the enemy, although eliminating fascism was of great importance. Ferguson also discusses the 'joy of war' that "men were fighting because they wanted to."¹³⁶ He suggests that Freud's psychoanalysis of "the natural instinct of aggressiveness in man,"¹³⁷ explains why millions of men spent over four years killing each other and being killed.

In recent war fiction this revised image of the soldier is not explored but nonetheless a serious contribution has been made to recreate an 'honest' representation of predominantly the Great War experience for both soldier and civilian. The superior narratives of two authors – Pat Barker and Sebastian Faulks have between them made a serious contribution to contextualising the World Wars within modern

¹³³ N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 1999.

¹³⁴ J. Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*, Granta Books, 1999.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.358.

¹³⁶ N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p.357.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.358.

memory. Essentially they address the permeation of World War One into the consciousness of subsequent generations and provide an image of the recent literary construct of the warrior. Both *Birdsong*¹³⁸ and *Another World*¹³⁹ explore the repercussions of the Great War on the relatives, both grandchildren. In *Another World*, Nick the grandson of a Somme veteran is disturbed by his grandfather's nightmares as he nears death.

Nick thinks: I can't bear this, and a second later is appalled by the selfishness of his response. If Granddad can bear it, he can.¹⁴⁰

Barker explores the psychological detritus of war on the relatives of veterans with the former unusually the focus.

Nick...stared at the inscription: To THE MISSING OF THE SOMME. He was repelled by it...If, Nick believed, you should go to the past, looking not for messages or warnings, but simply to be humbled by the weight of human experience...then Thiepval succeeded brilliantly...he walked across the grass and up the steps to the stone of sacrifice, feeling the weight of that experience heavy on the back of his neck.¹⁴¹

Another World unites official remembrance and private experience to create the effect of the Great War on subsequent generations and the psychological aftermath of conflict on the participant.

Faulks' *Birdsong* again provides a narrative of how the First World War has weaved its influence through history and generations. This time the granddaughter Elizabeth does not learn directly from her veteran grandfather (Wraysford) because he died before she was born. She pieces together his tragedy through visits to the French war cemeteries, the popular site of contemporary remembrance, and by reading his decoded diaries. Elizabeth's slow and painful unveiling of the truth is made more poignant by the reader's full knowledge of Wraysford's agonies. The remembrance

¹³⁸ S. Faulks, *Birdsong*, Vintage, 1994.

¹³⁹ P. Barker, *Another World*, Penguin, 1998.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 73.

of the Great War and its continuance in our subconscious are rhetorically secured by the uniting of past, present and future. Thus in the irrepressible face of memory we read first-hand of Wraysford's experiences; he writes it down, his granddaughter reads it in her own present. At the end of the novel Elizabeth has travelled so far into the pain and suffering of her unknown grandfather that she keeps his promise to a dying comrade to have the children he cannot have for him.

'It's a boy,' said Robert hoarsely.
 'I know. It's...,' She struggled on the word '... John.'
 'John? Yes, yes...that's all right.'
 'It's a promise,' she said. She was in a storm of weeping.
 'A promise...made by my grandfather.'¹⁴²

Even more recent novels set solely in the War period are concerned with the legacy of the conflict. Barker's *The Eye in the Door*¹⁴³ encapsulates present day thinking on the First World War in a passage that could only have been written towards the end of the Twentieth Century.

(Achilles Monument) This was the frequent objective on his evening walks, for no particular reason except that its heroic grandeur both attracted and repelled him. It seemed to embody the same unreflecting admiration of courage that he found in 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' a poem that had meant a great deal to him as a boy and still did, though what it meant had become considerably more complex. He stared up at the stupendous lunging figure, with its raised sword and shield and thought...that he was looking at the representation of an idea that no longer had validity.¹⁴⁴

This was certainly not a consideration of fiction contemporary to the War. Part of the development of Faulk's main character Charlotte Gray (the title of the novel)¹⁴⁵ is through her experiences as a child with her war traumatised father.

¹⁴² S. Faulks, *Birdsong*, p.502.

¹⁴³ P. Barker, *The Eye in the Door*, Penguin, 1993.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.127.

¹⁴⁵ S. Faulks, *Charlotte Gray*, BCA, 1998.

‘Let’s talk about your parents. Are they happy?’ ‘As far as I know,’ She thought of the windswept house, her father’s long absences at work, his awful wordless days, her mother’s nervously chattering complicity.¹⁴⁶

The second and final theme that predominates in these novels is the debunking of myths and the assertion of hidden truths in the representation of the soldier warrior. The *Regeneration* trilogy deals with the sufferers of shell shock (post-traumatic stress disorder) and how they live and cope with their horrors. The warrior image is deconstructed and in his broken, fallible spirit another kind of hero emerges, one it was uncomfortable and commercially unwise to write about until recently. In *Charlotte Gray* the central character and heroine of the World War Two story is a woman, again deconstructing the classic image of the war novel hero. In *Birdsong* the soldiers exist outside of the claustrophobic trenches. They had lives before the War, although they concede they have no future, dead or otherwise. Earlier fictional representations of the soldier are predominantly concerned with their life as a fighter, an aspect that revisionist research may reintroduce. Jack Firebrace’s past occupation as a miner is continued in his war duties as a tunneler. We are continually reminded of his family, his wife, her future loss and the memories of his son who dies whilst Jack is in France. Even Wraysford, family less, hardened by rejection and loneliness, a classic example of the professional warrior storming the German trenches, relents towards the end of the War when he becomes reliant on the letters of his ex-lover’s sister, Jeanne. The non-combatant is promoted and becomes very much part of the ‘total war’ experience more akin to what occurred in real life. Therefore contemporary war fiction is reflective in its drawing on an anticipation of memory.

The Literary and Oral Warrior: Some Comparisons with the Great War

George Orwell, who produced the most widely read memoir of the Spanish Civil War, wrote that writers were obsessed with Spain because ‘it was so like the Great War.’¹⁴⁷ Does this imply therefore that the literary image of the World War combatant is similar to that of the volunteer in Spain? Whilst there are many areas of

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁴⁷ G. Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, 1994, p.31.

common ground such as the importance of food, cigarettes and of comradeship, as in any war, their representation in memoirs and oral testimonies has striking differences. This indicates that the image of the Brigader has been carefully constructed, both intentionally and inadvertently, to highlight their political integrity and the cohesiveness of the group as a whole.¹⁴⁸ The very few diaries that were kept¹⁴⁹ record instances where there were problems with morale and discipline and are further evidence that the image has been built up by official historians both during and after the civil war. Interviews are also useful, especially when men talk of subjects outside of politics, such as the daily privations and small simple joys they shared with their comrades.

Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* investigates why soldiers of the Great War continued to fight for so long, when faced with such atrocious conditions and loss of life.¹⁵⁰ He examines the memoirs of the men and divides them into several categories that can also be used to compare and contrast with the few memoirs and larger number of oral testimonies of the Spanish veterans.

Finally, the importance given to Spanish Civil War memoirs by publishers is examined highlighting the difficulty faced by 'unknown' veterans in finding publishing houses outside of their locality.

Literary and oral representations of food are numerous in both World War and civil war accounts. Ferguson states that, "[n]early all war memoirs make it clear that morale was dependent on good rations."¹⁵¹ Likewise, food and eating appears in interviews with Brigaders and in their memoirs. John Peet similarly states that,

When you're longing for a meal it naturally has an effect on morale. I was always longing for a suet pudding with golden syrup over it.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ This is not unlike the state's objective to cover up instances of mutiny and desertion in the two World Wars.

¹⁴⁹ I examined the published and edited diaries of Syd Hamm and Fred Thomas.

¹⁵⁰ N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 1998, pp.339-366.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.350.

¹⁵² Interview with John Peet, 800/9, Imperial War Museum (IWM), London.

Walter Gregory and Fred Thomas also imply at the depression caused by lack of food. In addition to writing and talking about food, one admitted its important place in their time as volunteers.

After we'd been up the front all talk of football and sex disappeared and it was only talk of food. Food was really the most important thing that was next to any discussion of any kind.¹⁵³

This included political debates. Fraser and his comrades had it brought home to them after their experiences at the front that food was an essential ingredient for survival. In Fred Thomas' memoir food and the satisfaction it gave appear frequently with his joyous descriptions.

August 4th. Had an unexpected good feed to-day. Two of our gang went back on the scrounge into Corbera and got some olive oil from a ruined house... We dug up all the potatoes we needed from a nearby field – result, fried chips. They were grand.¹⁵⁴

August 8th. ...the grapes are invaluable. Often there are a whole field of them, luscious and ripe right now... They make a wonderful meal or dessert.¹⁵⁵

In Syd Hamm's diary, the basic necessity is likewise important to happiness.

19th May 1937, Food, bread, soup, mush and peas, rice pudding, cherries. Grand.¹⁵⁶

Similarly for those who smoked (the majority) the acquisition and possession of cigarettes was almost equal in importance to food. Ferguson combines alcohol and tobacco together as 'drugs,' "without alcohol and perhaps also without tobacco, the

¹⁵³ Interview with Harry Fraser, 795/5, IWM.

¹⁵⁴ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996 p.125.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁵⁶ R. Stradling (ed.), *Brother Against Brother*, 1998, p.161.

First World War could not have been fought.”¹⁵⁷ Whilst this is not strictly the case in terms of the Spanish volunteers, the importance of cigarettes appears in many Civil War accounts.

I had no trouble at all carting my books around Spain.
I did not smoke and nearly everybody else did, so I
only had to say, “If you’ll carry my books I’ll give
you three packs of cigarettes.” They would do
anything for a pack of cigarettes.¹⁵⁸

Again, like food the possession of cigarettes, in times of shortage, took precedence over all topics of discussion, including political debates.

The tobacco situation is again acute. All day we waited
anxiously for mail. I got a letter, a nice fat one containing –
John Strachey’s pamphlet, “Why you should be a Socialist!”
and nothing more. Leo Ganelling, my friend, curse you for
a fat-headed idiot for forwarding such nonsense.¹⁵⁹

Food and cigarettes while crucial to the morale of all combatants did not have the explosive potential of alcohol. Again Ferguson finds written evidence that affirms the importance of alcohol and its place in the literary heritage of, for example, the Great War.

‘Had it not been for the rum ration,’ one medical officer later
declared, ‘I do not think we should have won the war.’¹⁶⁰

Soldiers from all nations wrote in their diaries and memoirs of drink and even composed poetry to its virtues. It was a pastime, an anaesthetic and a morale booster and as such the military authorities tolerated amiable drunkenness. In France,

¹⁵⁷ N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 1998, p.351.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Edwin Greening, 9855/7, IWM.

¹⁵⁹ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996, p141.

¹⁶⁰ N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 1998, p.351.

soldiers were allowed to drink at estaminets within prearranged hours.¹⁶¹ Alcohol was regularly used for medicinal purposes or as a cheer-up. Likewise volunteers in Spain talked of sherry rations being dolled out before an attack. "Before going down to Chimorra for the attack we'd been given a hearty dose of sherry, they gave us double rations."¹⁶² However, excessive or persistent drunkenness in Brigade battalions was frowned upon and severely punished. Drunkards were often given similar treatment to deserters. John 'Bosco' Jones spent ten days in a 'Jerry Battalion' where at night they had the highly dangerous job of digging trenches in no-man's land.¹⁶³ Certainly the Communist Party's attitude to excessive alcohol consumption was puritanical. Despite their attempts to check persistent and heavy alcoholism there were many cases of drunken behaviour and even violence. Syd Hamm's diary continually refers to the inebriated behaviour of some of his comrades. However, the Communist Party of Great Britain's moralistic view has meant that the official historians and Communist Party stalwarts reject literary illusions to drunkenness within the Battalion. These images whilst acceptable to the vision of the World War soldier as understandable given their circumstances are not part of the construction of the ideal volunteer. The literature implies that fervour for the cause of the Spanish republic should have been intoxication enough. The memoirs examined do not mention the problems caused by alcoholism in any depth, although how far this was because they did not encounter any is difficult to ascertain. The same moralistic approach is taken with sexual encounters. World War One memoirs frequently mention sex and visits to brothels.¹⁶⁴ One officer wrote quite openly,

At home the out-of-touch atmosphere of 'patriotism' jarred so badly with the grim realities of the Front that to spend one's time amongst the brothels of France was often the preferred option.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ H. Siepmann, *Echo of the Guns: Recollections of an Artillery Officer, 1914-1918*, Robert Hale, 1987, p.105.

¹⁶² Interview with Joe Monks, 113043/4, IWM.

¹⁶³ Interview with John 'Bosco' Jones, 9392/6, IWM.

¹⁶⁴ N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 1998, p.353.

¹⁶⁵ H. Siepmann, *Echo of the Guns*, 1987, p.49.

Very few testimonies of Brigade veterans mention visits to brothels. Fred Copeman was the most forthcoming in his description of Sam Wild's search for a brothel, although Wild did not think it sufficiently important to mention it in his own testimony.¹⁶⁶ It would appear that many were put off or thought twice about indulging because of the Communist Party propaganda and their aim to keep a well-disciplined group of men.

I was slightly shocked by the idea, as a knight in shining armour fighting for the Spanish Republic, we should do anything as sordid as go to pick up a couple of girls off the street.¹⁶⁷

Volunteers may also have been deterred by punitive attitudes to sexually transmitted disease. "To get VD...you were told it was the equivalent of a self-inflicted wound, you were not only harming yourself but the Army."¹⁶⁸ Nowhere is the contrast in approach between the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party leadership more noticeable than their attitudes towards the leisure time of the men. Frank Frankford one of the small ILP contingent remarked,

It was said in Barcelona if you wanted to know where the English group was, you only had to go to the brothel area.¹⁶⁹

Ferguson's revisionist view of the First World War combatant suggests that there is no need "to overstate the importance of 'pals.'"¹⁷⁰ Friendships at the front-line were often short, ending with death or injury and so many men found it easier to harden themselves by not becoming involved. Yet although Fred Thomas' diary entries are perfunctory when he describes the loss of a comrade, they also imply an unwillingness to dwell on an upsetting episode.

30th August: George has gone and we all miss him, I

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Fred Copeman, 794/13, IWM. Interview with Sam Wild, 10358/3, IWM.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with John Peet, 800/9, IWM.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with James Jump, 9524/6, IWM.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Frank Frankford, 9308/5, IWM.

¹⁷⁰ N. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 1998, p.354.

particularly, for he was always a good pal.¹⁷¹

With the emphasis put on an international solidarity and comradeship by the Communist Party in particular, it is of little surprise that retrospective oral and written recollections speak movingly of the death of friends. Many spoke of collective comradeship.

For the first time in my life I recognised...a comradeship
amongst my own never before experienced.¹⁷²

I saw lads, my comrades that I'd learnt to love, die and
some of these boys never fired a bloody shot.¹⁷³

Yet it was the loss of individual friends that had the most profound effect. The depth of some of these recollections cannot be assigned to the promulgation of a myth of comradeship. Edwin Greening's oral account of losing his close friend Tom Howell Jones appears to be as clear as the day it happened, when compared with the letter he wrote about it at the time.

I said, "Tom I will remember you if 50 years will pass,"
well 50 years have passed and I still remember him.¹⁷⁴

In the Brigaders' representations of the war experience it is more important to write about personal comradeship, than the collective image broadcast by the Communist Party. Walter Gregory, for example, dedicates his memoir to an individual friend killed in Spain.

Bravery was another trait of the warrior. This has been interpreted by the Communist Party, among other ways as a commitment to staying in Spain. Whilst you could

¹⁷¹ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996, p.140.

¹⁷² Interview with Sam Wild, 10358/3, IWM.

¹⁷³ Interview with Charlie Morgan, 10362/2, IWM.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Edwin Greening, 9855/7, IWM.

volunteer to join the Brigade, you could not volunteer out. Fred Thomas was concerned by the lack of honesty in memoirs in admitting to a desire to leave.¹⁷⁵

I have read a great many personal reminiscences of those harrowing days. Not once have I seen a reference to this offer of Home Leave. Why not? I wonder, is the omission the result of an obligingly faulty memory, or the absurd notion that a good revolutionary is and must be seen to be above such human emotions as fear?¹⁷⁶

Walter Gregory's is one such memoir. His description of a near death experience, written to heighten the humorous element of the situation, trivialises what must have been a very frightening or at the very least nerve-wracking encounter with the enemy.

In a matter of seconds they seemed to be all around me but just to my right appeared what I am prepared to swear was the biggest Moor who had ever been born: a huge fellow with a full beard, dressed in a flowing poncho and sporting a fancy line in turbans.¹⁷⁷

A few attempted to be more measured and less selective. John Angus recalls an incident "...which ought to be recorded in the interest of historical accuracy..."¹⁷⁸ where,

After the terrible battering the battalion received at Brunete a number of survivors, perhaps as many as 60 or 70, though my memory is now hazy, expressed shall we say, a reluctance to return to...the front. Many of them claimed, I think honestly, that they had been told...they were signing on for only a limited period of some

¹⁷⁵ Box File 39, File A: Dependants' Aid: Leave – Repatriation, International Brigade Collection, Marx Memorial Library (MML), London.

¹⁷⁶ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996, p.140.

¹⁷⁷ W. Gregory, *The Shallow Grave*, Five Leaves Publications, Nottingham, 1986, p.47.

¹⁷⁸ J. Angus, *With the International Brigade in Spain*, Dept of Economics, University of Loughborough, 1983, p.6.

months...However what made the situation infinitely worse and added to the general atmosphere of cynicism and demoralisation, was that the entire British leadership...[had] been allowed to go home either on leave or permanently.¹⁷⁹

Not all at the same time one would imagine!

Some oral accounts are not afraid to show their terror in language that does not relish or glorify their situation. "We lay all that night and we were shaking. The next morning we went out...the planes came again and were gunning for over 3 hours – it was bad."¹⁸⁰

The old soldiers had told me the best thing when there's bombing is to have a piece of wood... I think that saved me from going crackers.¹⁸¹

Or simply,

I saw some horrible sights.¹⁸²

These comments have more impact than the gratuitous descriptions popular with some veterans.

The oral histories often mirror what veterans eventually write in their memoirs. However, Brigaders appear to speak more freely than they write.¹⁸³ The publication of a memoir is far more public than a one-to-one interview. Retrospective memoirs, whether consciously or inadvertently, are eager to emphasise the political cohesiveness of the group, or play down instances of drunkenness.

Wild and Cooney set about the task of restoring morale with a vengeance...They appreciated that every one of us was aware of immense fascist superiority in men and weaponry...A series of meetings and discussions was held, at both brigade and battalion level, and the message

¹⁷⁹ J. Angus, *With the International Brigade in Spain*, 1983, p.7.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with James Brown, 824/5, IWM.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Laurence George Wheeler, 11442/8, IWM. The wood was used to bite on during attacks in order to calm the combatant.

¹⁸² Interview with Jud Coleman, 14575/3, IWM.

¹⁸³ This does not include diaries kept at the time.

was driven home of the need to resist, to fight and fortify... Gradually the old camaraderie and sense of purpose took a strong hold.¹⁸⁴

No mention is made of problems in morale caused by requests for repatriation and refused leave only of the demoralisation connected with the fight against the enemy. Thus memoirs are far more faithful to the official version of the war.

There are many similarities in the primal instincts of the soldier, desire for food, alcohol and cigarettes and to a lesser extent sex. As would be expected the volunteers seemed more readily to express fears in oral and diary accounts than in their public memoirs. Absent from these are the bloodlust to kill the enemy that new research on World War combatants suggest existed. Part of the construction of their image as the political fighter was the emphasis put on the purity of the Republican cause and the volunteers' motivation and dedication to it. This is why the official history rejects alternative political views.

One of the first books about the British Brigaders to be published using an extensive collection of interviews was Judith Cook's *Apprentices for Freedom*.¹⁸⁵ Incorporating veterans' words interspersed with the author's comment and narrative Cook tells the story of the volunteers. The interviews she conducted are interesting, particularly one with Charlie Morgan who talked bluntly and gratuitously about both sexual experiences and the battlefield.

The slaughter just went on. Bob Elliot of Newcastle dropped dead beside me, some of my good Irish friends died there. It was a tragic waste of life. There was no relief... We had to leave our wounded where they were. We left men with their stomachs lying out trying to hold them in, we couldn't carry them. There were entrails lying around all over the place from those brave men.¹⁸⁶

However, Cook is keen to balance this with recollections that underplay the masculine, warring images of the volunteers.

¹⁸⁴ W. Gregory, *The Shallow Grave*, 1986, p.113-114.

¹⁸⁵ J. Cook, *Apprentices for Freedom*, Quartet Books, 1979.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.88.

He told me a story that he'd heard from his wife and she wasn't well, and the family were hard up and so on, so he felt his duty was to get home...there were a certain proportion that had no enthusiasm for the war, particularly after what they had seen on the Jarama.¹⁸⁷

A further example of reproducing the myth in literary and filmic representations was the documentary *Return to the Battlefields*¹⁸⁸ that appears to have been influenced by the Brigade association.

In 1981 many¹⁸⁹ of the veterans returned to Spain for the first time since they had left in 1938. Their emotional reunion with Spain, the Spanish and each other, nearly threatened by an abortive military coup, was filmed by a BBC documentary team and shown on BBC2 in February 1982. *The Return to the Battlefields* followed the men, accompanied by their partners, around the principle areas of their engagement, Jarama, Brunete, Hill 481 and the Ebro, recording their reactions and reminiscences. Retrospective and present day images were interspersed. A humorous account of the wall newspaper and the capturing of fascist beer on a sweltering day are juxtaposed by the scattering of veteran Alan Gilchrist's ashes at the foot of Hill 481 where he'd lost so many of his friends forty-three years before.¹⁹⁰

The documentary encapsulates the spirit and keeping of the past with contemporary images. Men hugging comrades at the airport or silent with recollection at the scene of battle, or walking proudly through the streets of a free Spain at a May Day parade with their banner, 'British Veterans Salute Spanish People.' There are a series of images of solidarity, internationalism and remembrance that symbolise how the memory of the International Brigade was being kept. It holds importance not only to the veterans but also to relatives. For the wife of one veteran, watching the video, it

¹⁸⁷ J. Cook, *Apprentices for Freedom*, 1979, p.82.

¹⁸⁸ *Return to the Battlefields* was broadcast in February 1982 on BBC2. Produced by Chris Cook.

¹⁸⁹ It is difficult to be exact about how many went back to Spain as the first group of ex-Brigaders since the civil war. An examination of the BBC2 documentary *Return to the Battlefields* shows approximately twenty veterans mostly accompanied by their partners. These included, Bill Alexander, Fred Thomas, Walter Gregory, Chris Smith, Tony McLean, Frank West and Miles Tomalin.

¹⁹⁰ His friend Chris Smith scattered the ashes and became emotional. He was comforted by one of the wives. He talked of how he'd lost many of his friends in the battle for Hill 481.

brought back memories of the trip and for a daughter watching for the first time, both tears and tremendous excitement at seeing her father on the film.¹⁹¹

The International Brigade accounts are set apart from the world war combatants by the continual presence of the Communist Party. To maintain an uncontentious representation of the political hero there must be no allusions to drunkenness, dissension, or desertion. In essence the spoken and written experience of war is very similar. However, the volunteer is often impelled through loyalty to the Communist Party to present a written image that agrees with this vision of the ideal Brigader; a man who is brave but not necessarily physically strong, fastidious but more importantly a politically disciplined soldier.

There are exceptions. Volunteers or prominent communists who became disillusioned with the Party after Spain wrote a limited number of Brigade memoirs, published in the Cold War period. These include Charlotte Haldane's *Truth Will Out*, Tom Wintringham's *English Captain* and Fred Copeman's *Reason in Revolt*. None of the three were prominently published memoirs. All remained convinced in spite of their disenchantment, of the rightness of the Brigade, the spirit in which they went to Spain and to the majority of their comrades. Haldane, who was in charge of the administration of the Dependents' and Wounded Aid Committee, initially a communist inspired idea, said in her memoir,

The vast majority were men of splendid types, honest and brave, who in greater or lesser degree were conscious of being engaged in a crusade to rescue democracy from the grip of Fascism.¹⁹²

Wintringham too paid tribute to the foresight of his comrades in the final lines of his memoir *English Captain*,

It is not a tale of pride, a tale of heroism and endurance,
that this book has been written. It is a description of a

¹⁹¹ The video of *Return to the Battlefields* was played at the Spanish Civil War Summer School on 27 July 1999. Reactions of Martha and Dora respectively.

¹⁹² C. Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, 1949, p.139.

'little war' ...on a small scale...that will happen more swiftly and on a larger scale in the world war we took aims to avert or postpone.¹⁹³

In common with all three memoirs was their disillusionment with the dominance of the Communist Party. Wintringham was expelled from the Party in 1939 when it attempted to influence his decision to marry a woman they believed unsuitable. Wintringham, married at the time, had fallen for American journalist Kitty Bowler whilst in Spain. The Party leadership at one stage called her an 'agent provocateur',¹⁹⁴ and gave him an ultimatum – the Party or Kitty. He chose Kitty but reluctantly left the Party. His memoir published very soon after his return from Spain is therefore not a damning indictment of communism *per se*. However, his freedom from the Party enabled him to write an uncompromising account, which did not conform to Party-spun myths. He tries, where possible, not to exaggerate the contribution of the Brigade and plays down one of the myths that was beginning to gain credence.

Don't let us exaggerate our Brigade did not save Madrid.
Madrid would have saved itself without us. But without
us Franco would have got further into Madrid; he would
have crossed the Casa del Campo and forced his way into the
streets of the City itself. There street fighting would have stopped
him; but he would have a foothold in the city.¹⁹⁵

He comments on the types of recruits he was training, and the difficulties with the idealists and the drunks, something he could not have written if he had still been in the Communist Party.

Most of our carefree volunteers saw no point in doing things
that displeased them, and some were very insistent on doing
what they pleased. That was our problem.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ T. Wintringham, *English Captain*, 1939, p.333.

¹⁹⁴ D. Fernbach, 'Tom Wintringham and Socialist Defence Strategy,' in *History Workshop Journal*, No. 14, Autumn 1982, p.71.

¹⁹⁵ T. Wintringham, *English Captain*, 1939, p.135.

Wintringham concerned himself primarily with his active service in Spain. He writes at great length on the military aspects of the war – a life-long interest for he later became a founding father of the Home Guard, although his service in Spain and association with the Communist Party prevented him from working as a military strategist for the Home Guard training unit at Osterley.¹⁹⁷

In contrast Fred Copeman's memoir, *Reason in Revolt*, covers his life up to the time of publication in 1948. Particularly valuable for the project's research is Copeman's associations with the Dependants' and Wounded Aid Committee, which he writes somewhat sentimentally came out of his sadness and disillusionment with the "callousness of many leading Party people to human suffering..."¹⁹⁸ unfortunately he doesn't say who these people were.

I would put my whole effort into helping those who needed it, the dependants of the men I had led, those who had shared my fears, my joys and who had shown the greatest heroism in our victories and defeats...I was to shed many a tear during my visits to their people; how fine they were perhaps only I can say.¹⁹⁹

Copeman's was the most damning indictment of Communism. His ideal, he wrote, was crushed by the ascendancy of Party politics over the popular front mentality, a dig at centralist dictates from Moscow, and how they rode roughshod over individual problems and opposite points of view.²⁰⁰ The memoir ends with him ironically finding solace in Catholicism.

There are also a few biographies of prominent people of the Brigade, printed by small local publishing houses. A pamphlet on Manchester's *George Brown – Portrait of a Communist Leader*, published by the North West Communist Party History Group in 1972²⁰¹ is a good example of a locally produced study. Quite often

¹⁹⁶ T. Wintringham, *English Captain*, 1939, p.100.

¹⁹⁷ D. Fernbach, *History Workshop Journal*, 1982, pp.76-77.

¹⁹⁸ F. Copeman, *Reason in Revolt*, 1948, p.150. Also interview with Owen, 18 August 1999, which gives another angle on Copeman's contribution to Dependants' Aid.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.150-151.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.85.

²⁰¹ There seems to have been a tradition of local publishing in Manchester. In 1937, the Manchester Dependants' Aid Committee produced a pamphlet on an Oldham hero entitled, *Clem Beckett, Hero*

these locally published biographies were the only means to produce a work on an individual Brigader who may have been well known in their community. Biographies on middle-class writers had more success because they were more usually public figures such as writers or intellectuals. An example of this is the joint life of John Cornford and Julian Bell – *Journey to the Frontier*,²⁰² both of whom were killed in Spain.

The following, **Table 1a**, shows that a few of the memoirs were published to coincide with anniversaries. Frank Graham as an independent publisher had more control over the publication of his pamphlet on Jarama for the fiftieth anniversary.²⁰³ Dates were not always intentional; Fred Thomas completed the commentary to his diaries and the editing process several years before an American firm finally accepted it. A British publisher could not be found because they believed there was not enough profit to be made.²⁰⁴

In fact publishing seems to have been a problem with the majority of memoirs. Usually a small, local printer/publisher had to be used as with *English Penny*,²⁰⁵ and *To Anti-Fascism by Taxi*.²⁰⁶

The Department of Economics at Loughborough University printed the transcript of an interview with John Angus as he was a former employee.²⁰⁷ The memoirs of Nan Green remain unpublished despite the efforts of her son to find a publisher.²⁰⁸ There are two notable exceptions; Penguin published Laurie Lee's autobiography. *A Moment of War* was the final part of a trilogy about his childhood and early adulthood, which included the acclaimed and best-selling *Cider with Rosie*. Collins, another large house, published Jack Jones' autobiography. Jones is a well known

and Sportsman. Edmund and Ruth Frow founders of the Salford Working-Class Movement Library and

responsible for the collection of the archives there edited a work entitled, *Bill Feeley: Singer, Steel Erector and International Brigader*, 1987, in conjunction with the AUEW to remember his life.

²⁰² P. Stansky and W. Abrahams, *Journey to the Frontier*, Constable, 1966. Cornford was a young poet and Bell was the nephew of Virginia Woolf.

²⁰³ F. Graham, *Battle of Jarama, 1937: The Story of the British Battalion of the International Brigade in Spain*, Frank Graham Publishing, Newcastle, 1987.

²⁰⁴ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996, p.xv.

²⁰⁵ P. Fyvel, *English Penny*, Arthur H. Stockwell, Ilfracombe, 1992.

²⁰⁶ H. Stratton, *To Anti-Fascism by Taxi*, Alun Books, Port Talbot, 1984.

²⁰⁷ J. Angus, *With the International Brigade in Spain*, 1983.

²⁰⁸ N. Green, *A Chronicle of Small Beer*, unpublished ms.

Table 1a**Spanish Civil War Memoirs since 1975**

Author	Table	Date	Publisher	Subject and Notes
Frank Deegan	<i>There's No Other Way</i>	1980	Toulouse Press	Autobiography up to Spain
J. Angus	<i>With the International Brigade in Spain</i>	1983	Loughborough University	Spain
Bob Clarke	<i>No Boots to my Feet</i>	1984	Stoke-on-Trent	Short Autobiography
Maurice Levine	<i>From Cheetham to Cordoba</i>	1984	Privately published	Spain
Harry Stratton	<i>To Anti-Fascism by Taxi</i>	1984	Alun Books, Port Talbot	Just prior to Spain, Spain and 1950's
Nan Green	<i>A Chronicle of Small Beer</i>		Unpublished	A life up to 1950's
Joe Monks	<i>With the Reds in Andalusia</i>	1985	Privately published	Spain
Jack Jones	<i>Union Man</i>	1986	Collins	Autobiography – Life
Walter Gregory	<i>The Shallow Grave</i>	1986	5 Leaves Publications	Spain
Frank Graham	<i>Battle of Jarama</i>	1987	Frank Graham	Specific, with contributions from other veterans
Laurie Lee	<i>A Moment of War</i>	1991	Penguin	Novelist, 'semi-fictional' about Spain only
Penny Fyvel	<i>English Penny</i>	1992	Arthur H. Stockwell, Illfracombe	Shore autobiography
Fred Thomas	<i>To Tilt at Windmills</i>	1996	Michigan University Press	Edited diary about Spain
Robert Stradling (Ed)	<i>Brother Against Brother</i>	1998	Sutton Publishing	Memoir of Frank Thomas and diary of Syd Hamm published together. About Spain only.

Source: Data collected from various memoirs.

personality ex-leader of the Transport and General Workers Union and more recently campaigner for pensioners' rights. His memoir *Union Man*²⁰⁹ is also one of the few that spans a whole lifetime. The others are concerned wholly with their experience in the Spanish Civil War. This is in marked contrast to the majority of memoirs written between 1939 and 1974, particularly those published within ten to fifteen years after the war. Many were prominent and well-known personalities, particularly within political circles. The civil war was still within close living memory of the likely book-buying audience at this time.

One of the most contentious memoirs is Jason Gurney's *Crusade in Spain*.²¹⁰ A middle-class sculptor from Chelsea, his bohemian ideal of communism did not fit comfortably with the highly disciplined approach of the political commissars of the Battalion. Gurney's disillusionment with the Communist Party was made blatantly clear throughout his account. Particularly memorable is his vehement attack on Harry Pollitt.

We had been warned he was coming to see us and everybody was full of expectation that he would bring messages of encouragement and joy. On the contrary. He had evidently come down with the express purpose of bawling us out...How dare we complain that we were not getting mail and cigarettes? – we were lucky enough to have been in the Battalion at all.²¹¹

His account appears at odds with the considerable documentary evidence that shows how meticulously Pollitt personally oversaw the domestic problems of the Battalion. Yet Gurney's memoir is used as an eyewitness account by two academics. The first Hugh Thomas²¹² and the second J. K. Hopkins, as part of the deconstruction of the myth of battle, still popular in the 1930's despite the horrors of the Western front.

Gurney went into battle with his mind conditioned by martial

²⁰⁹ J. Jones, *Union Man: The Autobiography of Jack Jones*, Collins, 1986.

²¹⁰ J. Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 1974.

²¹¹ *ibid.*, p.184.

²¹² Hugh Thomas also uses Tom Wintringham and Fred Copeman for the British Battalion's view of events.

narratives from films, which powerfully shaped his anticipation of what was to come. He and his fellow volunteers had assumed their places in a mythic discourse...For Gurney, the images were now in a state of disarray, and he had lost the narrative thread of his life as a soldier.²¹³

Crusade in Spain is also an example of the conflictual but ever present link between the International Brigade and the Communist Party. It would be extremely difficult to find a memoir or a history that did not discuss some aspect of the relationship between the volunteer and the Party. This is essentially related to the statistical superiority of Communist Party members within the British Battalion. Without the Communist Party's organisation the International Brigade would not have organised as many volunteers as it did. Therefore the Party's claim to be the only legitimate and untainted force fighting fascism has been open to much literary scrutiny if only to prove it right or wrong. The following two examples show the way the links between the Communist Party and the British Battalion members have been used in academic publications. Hywel Francis devotes a chapter to discussing the CPGB's role in 'recruiting' men from South Walian coalfields to fight in Spain.

What was remarkable was the way in which it was accepted almost uniformly as an obligation and even an honour.²¹⁴

These ties are reinforced by volunteer Billy Griffiths who, unsure of his physical capabilities as a soldier, remarked that this could be recompensed with, "...a great deal of political courage."²¹⁵ Here the literature is used to create a positive relationship between achievements in inspiring men's loyalties to the cause, even men who are not considered 'traditional' warriors.

On the contrary in more recent research, using newly available archives at the Russian Centre for the Preservation and Study of Recent Historical Documents in Moscow, James K. Hopkins dedicates a chapter to 'the army of the forgotten,'²¹⁶

²¹³ James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 1998, p.193.

²¹⁴ H. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 1984, p.170.

²¹⁵ W. Griffiths, *Spain*, 1964, unpublished ms, p.2.

²¹⁶ James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 1998, p.258.

Those are the volunteers who had fallen foul of the Communist Party for various reasons from cynicism to disobedience on the battlefield. They have been forgotten because in addition to the censored files these particular volunteers present an alternative vision. Their individualism and outspokenness was thought to put in jeopardy the collective and unified army of freedom fighters. A file has even been kept on exemplary fighter, and for a time political commissar, Fred Thomas. The records commented on his cynicism towards and open criticism of the Communist Party membership in Spain.²¹⁷ An extract from his diary indicate his complaints about political organisation were not one-sided. He gave credit where he believed it was warranted.

16 May 1938: What is most disturbing is that the bad elements in leadership seem to be in control. I believe that Political Commissars in such places as hospitals etc have ceased to justify their existence. I do not mean that P.C's are undesirable. I merely say that too many of the samples are of poor material... The difficulty is that whereas at the Front there is a great measure of contact and understanding between Commissars, Commanders and men (as a general rule, anyway) here and in similar places one rarely ever sees the Commissar, and knows the Commander only by seeing his signature over a decree giving guys ten days prison for being drunk or something like.²¹⁸

The Brigade is conclusively associated with the Communist Party despite the membership of Labour Party, Independent Labour Party and other left-wing orientated people. A quantitatively poor amount of literature produced on the International Brigade during the Cold War period and the nature of publications that were (for example Hugh Thomas) is testament to that. Increasingly since the dominance of the International Brigade Association (IBA) in prescribing what is official history and what should be disregarded the ideal Brigader is more likely to have been a dedicated communist, than a member of the Labour Party. Not sufficient

²¹⁷ James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 1998, p.265 Hopkins noted from Fred Thomas' file in the Moscow archives that, "he tends to be cynical...[and] is openly critical of the C.P. membership in Spain."

²¹⁸ F. Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996, p.103.

to have been a volunteer one needed political credentials that were beyond reproach. Hence the relegation of Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* to an oppositional text and the erasure of the Independent Labour Party contingent from the official history of the volunteers.

Bill Alexander and his vision of the war

The literary image of the Brigade is of great importance to the veterans and none more so than to the previous Secretary of the IBA, Bill Alexander.²¹⁹ With the increase in publications on the British Brigaders, Alexander and others, greatly concerned with the public representation of the image of the individual Brigader, put up a forceful defence against what they saw as the political slanders of George Orwell and the 'fictitious' memoirs of Laurie Lee. Alexander articulated many of the concerns of the relatives interviewed regarding *Homage to Catalonia* in his essay 'George Orwell and Spain.'²²⁰ Alexander thought that Orwell's 'unusual' and 'unrepresentative' view of the war in Spain is linked to his 'remoteness and detachment.'²²¹ The novelist's individualism was a personality trait that did not suit the Communist Party and it contributed to, in Alexander's view, Orwell's 'fantasised, romanticised account.' Alexander's main criticism, quite apart from Orwell's depiction of the Communist Party, is the complete ignorance Orwell appeared to have for the political situation in Europe. Alexander felt that Orwell had failed to learn the true lessons of Spain, as essentially a struggle between liberty and oppression and not about Communism versus Fascism.²²² He felt justified enough by the ubiquitous popularity of Orwell's memoir to contribute to a book of left-wing views of Orwell's work, conscious no doubt of the sort of publicity the Communist Party was getting especially among the younger generation.

Every school student taking O and A Level exams in modern
history is told to read George Orwell's *Homage* in order to

²¹⁹ At the time of writing Bill Alexander died. 11th July 2000.

²²⁰ This article appeared in *Orwell: Views from the Left*, 1984, pp.85-102, edited by C. Norris.

²²¹ *ibid.*, p.95.

²²² *ibid.*, p100. This is a common criticism. See Alexander's remarks on Hugh Thomas in *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.282, in which he warns the reader of Thomas' uncomplimentary opinion of the volunteers and their cause.

gain an understanding of the Spanish War.²²³

Alexander's article criticises Orwell's reliability and understanding of the situation in Spain by a series of personal attacks on his character.

He appears as a loner. This characteristic is in reality confirmed by the fantasised, romanticised account...of his brief encounter with an Italian volunteer.²²⁴

He also questions his anti-fascist credentials. Harry Pollitt refused to assist Orwell to go to Spain through the International Brigade because he had served in the imperialist police force in Burma. Moreover when Orwell explained that, "when I see an actual flesh and blood worker in conflict with his natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask which side I am on..." Alexander felt it was strange reasoning given his own past and when one recalls he had not taken part in the unemployed and anti-fascist demos.²²⁵ One senses Alexander's anger that Orwell's vision of events should have become prescribed reading on Spain.

No! Orwell had qualities as an observer but his conclusions have little relation to what he had seen.²²⁶

The depth of animosity felt by some veterans to Orwell's version of events has not subsided with the passing of time. In 1999 Frank Graham's pamphlet on the Battles of Brunete and the Aragon²²⁷ described *Homage to Catalonia* as, "...a mixture of muck and fantasy..."²²⁸ and Orwell as a "neurotic liar about writers with whom he disagreed..."²²⁹ These examples only serve to show that the political disagreements within the left are still as strongly displayed as they were sixty years ago affirming the importance attached to defending and upholding the constructed image of the Brigader as political exemplar.

²²³ C. Norris (ed), *Orwell: Views from the Left*, 1984, p.85.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, p.95.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.93.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, p.97.

²²⁷ F. Graham, *Battles of Brunete and the Aragon*, Frank Graham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1999.

²²⁸ *ibid.*, p.57.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, p.58.

Orwell is not the only author or more precisely memoirist to come under the attack of Alexander and like-minded veterans. Laurie Lee's *A Moment of War* is a chronologically and factually inaccurate account of his abortive attempt to join the International Brigade. A combination of the fifty-year gap before writing and the *raison d'être* of the literary novelist has produced, in a similar vein to Orwell, an evocative and beautifully written novel as opposed to an autobiography. Lee's encounter with a senorita and experience of shooting a fascist point-blank are as much to add romance and action than a portrayal of the real life experiences of an International Brigader. As one veteran writes,

In this alleged account of his deeds of derring-do in the Spanish Civil War,...Lee was not intending to miss any tricks. Everything required for a pot-boiler is there, from the ubiquitous sex (I should have been so lucky!) to Secret Agent to fighting on the Teruel Front. I can see him at his typewriter – 'Let me see now, I think a spot of hand-to-hand combat would go down well here. Come to think of it, why don't I shoot someone point-blank? Yes that will do nicely...' ²³⁰

When the book was published in 1991, Bill Alexander addressed the following points:

Laurie Lee describing chaos at Figueras said, "a majority vote decided to drill" this might have been possible in December 1936 but NOT December 1937. Francois Mazou a tough experienced fighter was in command and when Mike Economides was posted there 17 January 1938 he found existing firm discipline and organisation. ²³¹

Alexander was again perturbed by Lee's depiction of the International Brigade.

You could pick out the British by their nervous jerking heads, native air of suspicion and constant stream of self-effacing jokes...[they] could be divided up into the ex-convicts, the alcoholics, the wizened miners, dockers, noisy politicians. ²³²

²³⁰ Fred Thomas, privately written piece on *A Moment of War*, dated 26 January 1998.

²³¹ IBA Newsletter, 1991, p.3-4.

²³² L. Lee, *A Moment of War*, 1991, p.45.

The interesting difference between the two criticisms is the first veterans' concern with the sacrifice of factual accuracy for the purposes of the novelistic device, whilst Alexander's problem is with inaccuracies that damage the image of the volunteers. In his opinion Lee fails to grasp how this group of individuals could, against all odds, keep fascist forces at bay for almost three years. That "[t]he British Volunteers for Liberty proved that fascism was not invincible. They taught the peoples of the world the lesson of unity and struggle."²³³ For Alexander, Lee's work is romanticised, politically naïve and thus not part of the official history of the Brigade.

Nothing was published in public regarding Lee's account until after his death in May 1997.²³⁴ The debate was reopened with much ferocity after Simon Courtauld's article in *The Spectator*.²³⁵ Courtauld states that Lee's account contains a "[g]reat deal of falsifying and embellishment."²³⁶ He mentions the obvious discrepancies in chronology when Lee arrives in Spain and spends the longest December in literary history, firstly as a mountaineer (over the Pyrenees), a two-week period in prison, ten days at Figueras, two more days travelling to Albacete, an indeterminate time there, all in time to spend Christmas at Tarazona. Quite apart from the understandable lapse in memory during the intervening fifty years, Courtauld goes on to assert that if Lee had been at Teruel, he may have witnessed the Nationalist cavalry charge, one of the last in the history of warfare.

The debate continued on the first anniversary of Lee's death with an article in *The Guardian*,²³⁷ well known for championing independent or alternative thoughts and opinions. It defends Lee and is particularly scathing of Bill Alexander, asserting that he had only gone public (to Simon Courtauld in *The Spectator*) when Tom Buchanan had used Lee's book as evidence, thus giving it credibility.

The mention of history jarred. For when it comes to history,
Alexander is not a reliable witness...His understandable
loyalty to his comrades meant that the Brigades had to

²³³ IBA Newsletter, 1991, p.4.

²³⁴ Bill Alexander wrote about Lee's book in the IBA Newsletter in 1991 when the book was first published.

²³⁵ S. Courtauld, 'A Not Very Franco Account,' *The Spectator*, 3 January 1998.

²³⁶ *ibid.*,

²³⁷ Michael Eaude, 'Fighter or Faker?' *The Guardian*, 13 May 1998.

be whiter than white.²³⁸

This is a particularly revealing statement when considering how the official image of the Brigader has been constructed using, in the main, the idea of the perfect 'politico' and Alexander's loyalty to comrades who agree with an orthodox communist interpretation of the Brigade. The article goes on to argue that far from intentionally falsifying facts, Lee was merely clumsy and sloppy with dates, pointing towards documentary evidence that he entered Spain in December 1937 and was imprisoned, spent time at Figueras and Albacete and finally assigned to light duties which could have included spying. The only point Eaude concedes to Alexander is that Lee's chapter on Teruel was both "bizarre and improbable."²³⁹ Although his killing a man is not corroborated it cannot be totally out of the question.

The Guardian article ends the public debate on Lee. A review of the book by veteran John Dunlop was not printed by them but appears in Frank Graham's pamphlet on Brunete.²⁴⁰ Dunlop pulls up Lee on certain factual errors, namely that he would never have received a 100 pesetas bill at Figueras and that Spanish uniforms did not have zips.

Either his memory is failing him or he had some inner
compulsion to fantasise...for him to have written such
a lot of high-flown rubbish.²⁴¹

However, Dunlop like Alexander is more offended by Lee's depiction of his comrades as 'half-wits', 'dropouts' and 'convicts'. He throws more doubt on Lee's account by noting his reluctance to associate with other veterans. "This is unusual as we practically all have kept up friendships forged in Spain."²⁴²

What appears evident from the public debate (apart from defending Lee's position with the use of archival evidence) is the desire to attack the official history of the British Brigade. For Alexander and some of the veterans who have spoken out, it

²³⁸ M. Eaude, 'Fighter or Fake?' *The Guardian*, 13 May 1998.

²³⁹ *ibid.*,

²⁴⁰ F. Graham, *Battles of Brunete and the Aragon*, 1999.

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.62.

²⁴² *ibid.*, p.62.

remains the principle to defend an entrenched and collective truth about the image of the Brigader. Yet ultimately what is clear from the heated and personalised attacks of both sides is that Lee was in Spain and did attempt to join the International Brigade. He has, however, deliberately embellished some of his experiences and fantasised and romanticised others in order to tell a good yarn. So a more appropriate genre for *A Moment of War* is a novel loosely based on fact rather than a memoir. Consequently the official historians of the British Battalion cannot highlight what, in their terms, would be the positive points of the book because these could legitimise the rest of the novel. The following quotes from the book indicate where Lee's true feelings about the war and the volunteers lie.

I believe we shared something else, unique to us at that time-
the chance to make one grand, uncomplicated gesture of
personal sacrifice and faith which might never occur again.²⁴³

And Lee's reflection on how the official British history has treated the volunteers.

Here were the names of dead heroes, piled into little
cardboard boxes, never to be inscribed later in official
Halls of Remembrance. Without recognition, often
ridiculed, they saw, what was coming jumped the gun
and went into battle too soon.²⁴⁴

Another controversial literary reproduction was Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*. For the mainly Communist Party veterans the choice of story is highly political. To them, as with *Homage to Catalonia*, the popular representation of the Spanish Civil War is once again oppositional memory. Veterans and their families particularly found Loach's depiction of the Communist Party's role especially offensive. Most often mentioned in interviews with both veterans and their relatives is the tearing-up of the Communist Party card.²⁴⁵ The destruction of the card seems to be the symbolic nadir

²⁴³ L. Lee, *A Moment of War*, 1991, p.46.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.174-175. This quote is a stock official response. The American Brigaders were described as the 'premature anti-fascists'.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Alfred, 1 December 1998. Alfred was disgusted by this depiction.

of the film – the rejection and erasure of association with communist ideology and belief. In a local newspaper one reader wrote,

In the Loach film, the fictional Liverpoolian, disillusioned with Communism, burns his party card. In reality, my father left Blackwood a communist and returned home even more dedicated and committed.²⁴⁶

Frank Graham believed it to be highly unlikely that a card-carrying member of the Communist Party would end up with the POUM militia. However, this did happen to the poet John Cornford who went out alone to Spain in August 1936 before the Brigade were officially formed, later joining up with the International Brigade to get away from the inaction of the Aragon front.²⁴⁷ Finally, for the Communist Party it was a ludicrously idealistic notion that a social revolution in Spain should take precedence over defeating the fascists. This ideal of revolution over war is especially well chronicled throughout the film. The most memorable scene mentioned by several of the sample²⁴⁸ sees the newly liberated villagers and the militia unit discuss whether to collectivise their village. The lone voice of the American (later part of the communist group that breaks up the POUM) suggests to the group that perhaps the most important issue is to defeat the fascists is symbolically shouted down.

It comes as little surprise therefore that the most unfavourable reviews of the film emerge from staunch Communist Party veterans eager to defend the record of the Communist Party and the International Brigade in Spain and to highlight the shortsighted social revolution policy.

The Communist Party, and most of the parties that supported the Catalan government, described this policy as ludicrous and placed the military victory over Franco as the priority of all anti-fascists.²⁴⁹

They [the POUM militia group of the film] were passive in the

²⁴⁶ Letter written by Joe in *South Wales Echo*, 8 March 1996.

²⁴⁷ James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 1998, p.129.

²⁴⁸ By John, Susie, Pam, James, Lydia, Martha.

²⁴⁹ Frank Graham, *The New Worker*, 'A travesty of the Spanish Civil War,' 13 October 1995.

mainstream of anti-fascist struggle, apart from the mass of the people and more concerned with their emotional problems than the defeat of Franco.²⁵⁰

Concern was also shown with the status of the 'hero.' The depiction of the individual International Brigader remains a sensitive one and acceptance of the image depends on strict criteria that Loach's character (David Carr) did not meet.

Hart, no sincere anti-fascist and certainly no hero...²⁵¹

Among them are a few non-Spaniards including an Englishman who is the "hero" – if we can use that term in such a context.²⁵²

Orthodox Communists eagerly asserted the position of the Brigaders as the heroes and not the main protagonists of the film explicitly associated with the Orwellian version of history. For them the depiction is marred not only by deed but association. However, most interesting is the potential influence they anticipate on the memory of the Brigade,

It is one of the farces of history that a handful of ILPers, whose contribution to defeating Franco was microscopic, should have received masses of publicity.²⁵³

It exposes the purposely-controversial political statement that Loach wished to make; that it was one small part of the civil war, of which numerically and militarily the Brigaders were a bigger part. The idea of being proud enough of their part in the war to tell their family also makes the narrow assumption that to keep involvement secret was because you were ashamed of what you had done.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Bill Alexander, *Morning Star*, 'Ken Loach's film...is frustratingly inaccurate...' 7 October 1995.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*,

²⁵² F. Graham, *Morning Star*, 'A travesty of the Spanish Civil War,' 13 October 1995.

²⁵³ B. Alexander, *Morning Star*, 'Ken Loach's film... is frustratingly inaccurate...' 7 October 1995.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*,

He could not have been proud of his part in Spain since his granddaughter only learned of it after his death.²⁵⁵

Metaphorically those with a voice are worth hearing because they are speaking the collective truth. Hence the concern to 'shout down' oppositional voices. Only certain versions of the 'story' can be heard.

Other veterans not closely associated with the Communist Party did not feel sufficiently angered by the film to write about it. Their responses were more measured, prepared to see the merits of the film whilst still being aware that it was controversial. One veteran said,

I liked it. I agree at the very end there was some exaggeration where they made the point about communists coming down but I'm prepared to believe that although the detail might be wrong, in principle it was fairly accurate. There was a great deal increasingly about Party domination as the war progressed, much, much more so. I really enjoyed the scenes of those anarchists at their meetings and so on.²⁵⁶

There are difficulties in finding a fairly objective opinion of *Land and Freedom* as it attacks so many tenets of the official history disseminated by the IBA. The depiction of the Communist Party's role in the Barcelona uprising was the most serious attack in the opinion of the IBA. The association between the Communist and the International Brigade has been made so strongly that to question the integrity of one is to denigrate the other. Of equal importance to Alexander and similar minded veterans remained the message that subsequent generations would receive. For them too great a risk lay in allowing those in the early stages of forming political opinions and allegiances to make up their own minds. Hence Alexander's concern that his grandchildren should not see the film. Similar concerns were voiced about Orwell.

Alexander used official history to preserve a vision of both the British Battalion and the Communist Party illustrating comradeship, sacrifice and high moral values – an

²⁵⁵ B. Alexander, *Morning Star*, 'Ken Loach's film...is frustratingly inaccurate...' 7 October 1995. There are numerous reasons why a veteran would not tell their family.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Fred Thomas, 24 November 1998.

army of politically dedicated volunteers never deviating from a pattern of thought in line with Communist Party thinking. *Land and Freedom*, *Homage to Catalonia* and *A Moment of War* fall outside of these concepts because they highlight divisions, controversies and depictions that may throw into disarray the portrayal of solidarity so vehemently defended by Alexander.

While he was alive Alexander assumed the title of gatekeeper of the memory of the International Brigade in Britain. His dedication to the orthodox Communist interpretation of events has been so determined that he appeared to be the only person entitled to keep the memory of the volunteers.

The Family as a Literary Presence

In complete contrast to the volunteer centred dominance of histories and fiction exists the quantitatively poor material about the families of Brigaders. Very few examples of publications exist that take account of the volunteers in their private environment – the family home, already demonstrated by the oral historians' lack of interest in the effects the civil war had on the relatives of men who returned. Their own memoirs all too often finish with the end of their service in Spain. Likewise serious studies ignore the wider implications of being a willing fighter. This in turn has resulted in a virtually non-existent bibliography written about and by the family. The few books produced by relatives relate to the veterans and not to their own experiences. Therefore the place they give themselves within the literature has so far been dominated by the myths that grew up externally around the International Brigade, as well to influences of their childhood.

The first part of this section examines a variety of literary forms that have discussed the relatives of Brigaders and some aspects of their emotional involvement in the war. *We Live*,²⁵⁷ written by the South Walian Communist councillor Lewis Jones, is one of the first of only a few texts to include the likely repercussions of the civil war for the family of a volunteer leaving for Spain who later dies in the conflict. The characters are said to be based on people Jones knew. Jones died suddenly in January 1939 exhausted by his campaign in support of the Republican cause. So a friend and

²⁵⁷ L. Jones, *We Live*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1978, (1939)

political colleague Mavis Llewellyn using Jones' notes completed the last two chapters.²⁵⁸ Thus Llewellyn dealt with those aspects of the book addressing the grief and emotional impact of the war. The main characters, particularly the bereaved wife Mary, appear less two-dimensional in this final section. They are no longer the political caricatures used by Jones to recreate the class-conscious solidarity of a South Walian mining town. One of the final scenes sees Mary reading her husband Len's last letter from Spain knowing that he is already dead.

She felt there was something within her that wanted to escape.
It seemed to dog her body and make it hard to breathe...when
she ran headlong from the room she left a moan behind: 'Oh
Len. You are gone forever.'²⁵⁹

We Live has a feminine ending²⁶⁰, carefully balancing intense emotion and politics, the private and the public world of the female political activist, perhaps the sensations and experiences that Mavis Llewellyn herself encountered. What makes *We Live* different is that the death of the hero is seen through the eyes of his wife and parents, their loss sharply juxtapositioned against a jubilant and resilient politicised working-class community.

Hywel Francis is the only historian to have considered the consequences of leaving behind a wife and children.²⁶¹ His work on the Welsh International Brigaders is well respected in Wales by both relatives and veterans for the strong identification with the Welsh experience of working-class struggle and internationalism. He addresses the 'problem' of family in *Miners Against Fascism* in a chapter entitled, 'Volunteering: A Party Decision?' Although the main theme concentrated on how great an influence the Communist Party had on the decision to volunteer, Francis does include what veterans say about the involvement and role of their relatives in

²⁵⁸ Interview with Mavis Llewellyn, 16 May 1974, AUD/98, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC), Swansea.

²⁵⁹ L. Jones, *We Live*, 1978, p.333.

²⁶⁰ H. Francis, 'Say Nothing and Leave in the Middle of the Night,' *History Workshop Journal*, 1991, p.74.

²⁶¹ In *ibid.*,

their decision making process, or with the difficulties they encountered when leaving home for Spain.

Griffiths was nonetheless aware of his own dilemma. His mother was a widow who could not understand her son. She was rearing a granddaughter still at school.²⁶²

This is one of the first admissions that the image of volunteering involves other less soldierly sacrifices. Francis further explores what he terms a 'reassessment' of the story of the Brigade in 'Say Nothing and Leave in the Middle of the Night,'

I believe we do a great dis-service to the volunteers and to history if we merely dwell on this timeless, manly, macho 'going off to war.'²⁶³

Here he introduces again the family involvement (or non-involvement in many cases) in decisions to volunteer. The relatives had a profound effect on morale. They pleaded with the men to come home in letters they wrote and most poignant are their reactions when the men did not return. More important is the recognition that popular memory can be selective,²⁶⁴ burying for whatever reasons images of protest and pain in favour of a romantic, heroic reading of the Brigade.

With the opening of the Moscow based Comintern archives in 1996 the International Brigade has become further enmeshed in the political debates and controversies that surround the Communist Party's involvement in Spain. Hopkins in his *Into the Heart of the Fire* is the first writer to use this archive material. Those who displayed individualist characteristics or were critical of the Communist Party were noted in their files. Letters to family that criticised organisation or decision-making within the Communist Party were severely censored. Frank Farr, a member of the first British ambulance unit, wrote a letter to his wife that she never received. It remains in the Moscow archive and is quoted for the first time in Hopkins' book.²⁶⁵ Part of it

²⁶² H. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 1984, p.174

²⁶³ H. Francis, *History Workshop Journal*, 1991, p.71.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.76.

²⁶⁵ James K. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 1998, p.266.

reads, "...the theory that wounded men can live, thrive, and mend on bad political speeches was exploded but they still try to work it." Hopkins does not go on to discuss the implications of withholding letters from family or, indeed of seeing them reproduced for the first time in a book sixty years later. In fact, to be fair an examination of the family was not the main remit of the book, but rather to question the ideal of communism and the Party's role in Spain.

Memoirs also offer minimal material into their family situations. Quite often a paragraph appears explaining, for example, how their parents felt or how they said goodbye to their children.

She [mother] was astonished at what she considered to be
my stupidity in going to fight in another nation's war.
Still being able to recall vividly the horrors of the First
World War she assumed that the war in Spain would
simply be a repeat of its slaughter...²⁶⁶

I had arranged with a girl I was friendly with...to get in
touch with my family and tell them. So I was already
on my way to Spain when they heard about it. They never
remonstrated with me and I firmly believe that my father
was quite proud that his son had gone to fight...²⁶⁷

Veterans certainly found it easier to write about 'their' war than about the private domain of the family and the problems departure may have caused. On reflection too deep an investigation may have interfered with a unanimous and popular response to the War. More realistically they were too concerned with writing about their part in the International Brigade. Certainly the public were definitely more interested in the warriors' experiences than the feelings of their relatives. Certainly from examining the collection of taped interviews with veterans made by the Imperial War Museum it would appear that some were not averse to talking about their families in some depth. But interviewers were anxious to find out about veterans' experiences in Spain and their political background. Very few questions were asked about the feelings of

²⁶⁶ W. Gregory, *The Shallow Grave*, 1986, p.21.

²⁶⁷ M. Levine, *From Cheetham to Cordoba*, 1984, p.30.

parents, or how wives and dependants coped financially while they were gone. Interesting comments made by veterans about their relatives were not followed up. The few published oral anthologies of the Brigade are similarly preoccupied with the event. *The Road to Spain*²⁶⁸ contains interviews with seventeen volunteers. Only two of them questioned directly about how their parents reacted or whether they told them. The women interviewed were not asked about their home-life. Whether this is considered too intrusive or delicate is not made clear. Nan Green, for example, lost her husband George in Spain. She had previously gone out there to join him leaving her two children in the care of a boarding school. Nor are the single women asked about the impact their decision had on parents. Could the private be too personal and sensitive an area to delve into?

In Hywel Francis' oral based history, *Miners Against Fascism*, he was warned against visiting relatives to talk about Brigaders who had been killed in Spain.

...it's a bit touchy visiting relatives as one often gets some nasty remarks instead of complements. I've had some during activities as relatives are not always enthusiastic about us.²⁶⁹

There is almost the assumption and certainly the expectation that the family should support the veterans.

When Ian MacDougall interviewed twenty Scottish volunteers,²⁷⁰ the common questions were confined to the political and physical experience of the war. Whenever the personal was introduced it was used to describe the impact of war on the veterans. Of the eighteen interviews examined, five veterans talked briefly about when they left, their parents' or spouses' reactions but only one mentioned how his wife coped whilst he was away.

Existing archives, therefore are primarily concerned with the event, the veterans' experiences in the civil war and their political background and motivation. This has much to do with what interviewers and veterans believed to be of most interest and

²⁶⁸ D. Corkhill and S. Rawnsley (eds), *The Road to Spain: Anti-Fascists at War 1936-1939*, Borderline Press, Dunfermline, 1981.

²⁶⁹ H. Francis, *History Workshop Journal*, p.72. Quoted from a letter sent to Francis by Pat Murphy.

²⁷⁰ I. MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, Polygon, Edinburgh, 1986.

importance. So, although the content of memoirs are in theory under the control of the writer (the veteran) they are influenced by what has gone before. A reticence to talk about the personal and private for whatever reason also had some bearing; combined with the interviewers' power over the questions asked and the editing has resulted in the marginalisation of the family in the oral and biographical historiography of the Brigade.

This appears to be different in the one feature film of the civil war – *Land and Freedom*, which incidentally gives importance to the repercussions of war that include a family member. David Carr's granddaughter, Kim, frames the film. After her grandfather's death she discovers a box of memorabilia when sorting out his effects. The box contains letters from the front, newspaper cuttings, photographs and a red handkerchief filled with earth from his Spanish sweetheart's grave. Then the story of his journey to Spain and his experiences there unfolds. The final scene of Carr's funeral shows Kim throw the Spanish soil into his grave and give the clenched fist Republican salute implying that the memory of the war is passed on, not by Carr but a series of other devices. This becomes the most satisfactory part of the film showing the wider impact and meaning of the war on others than the protagonists. It opens up issues of the pride in discovering a family secret and about being the bearer of memory. Disappointingly these are merely signalled throughout the film and not explored in any depth. Yet this aspect of the film struck a chord with just one of the relatives sampled. John stated that his father possessed a similar box full of Spanish memorabilia.²⁷¹

The imbalance in representation has not provoked family to redress it by writing about their own experiences. This has much to do with the awareness that through both literature and public expression the volunteer has become the centre of interest and importance. So exceptionally few pieces reflecting their own feelings have been written about the veterans.

The few contributions act as elegies and tributes to remembering and carrying on the memory. Richard Felstead's story of his grandfather Jack Roberts, the biography *No Other Way*, is dedicated to his own children. "For Dewi and Rhian who have so

²⁷¹ Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

much, hoping you will remember your fathers, who had so little.” Underneath the dedication he quotes an Idris Davies poem, ‘The Angry Summer.’ The last two lines,

But you will be sons of theirs,
Keeping their torches bright,

illustrate that the book is not only a tribute but also a physical, tangible contribution to keeping the memory of his grandfather alive. *No Other Way* bursts with filial pride and a lyrical fable-like quality interspersed with the reality of Jack’s engagement. The following passage combines all of these features.

Night passed and the summer dawn blew its warm breath through
the shutters. Peering into the kitchen Jack saw a bowl and jug of water.
He decided to freshen up while he had a chance. Removing his tunic, he
washed away the day’s dust and sweaty fatigue. Refreshed, and dripping
water, Jack looked around for a towel. At that moment something crashed
through the window and exploded in the passageway. Jack was bolted back
into the reality of war...A sniper had bound together two hand grenades and
thrown them through the window in an attempt to kill Jack. The first twenty-
four hours of the battle were over. Villanueva captured. Dickie dead, Leo
seriously injured and Jack had only narrowly eluded the shears of Atopos.²⁷²

Martin Green also wrote a tribute, *Gandesha: elegy for the dead in Spain*, not only to his father but also to the other fallen who appeared on the original roll of honour. His father George Green was not included on the roll printed in Bill Rust’s official history, *Britons in Spain*, as he was killed on the last day of Brigade engagement. Green writes that the elegy had a dual purpose for him. “To say farewell to a father I last saw when I was four years old and to give a more permanent memorial to the men of the British Battalion.”²⁷³ It has fifteen verses mainly of five line stanzas, which call out the dead alphabetically naming where they originated from and where they were killed.

²⁷² R. Felstead, *No Other Way*, Alun Books, 1981, p. 81.

²⁷³ Note at the beginning of *Gandesha, Elegy for the dead in Spain*, Green Rivers Press, 1996, (1986).

Whoever they left there must have been sorrow
 Winter, Wise and Wolsterncroft
 From Glasgow, London and Oldham
 Who died at Brunete, Cordova , Aragon
 But the tears that were shed no others could borrow.²⁷⁴

Gandesa is named after the place where Green's father fell, so in effect it acts as a literary headstone. It also has a spectral dream-like quality, conjuring up the rows of dead, imagining they file past, silently mouthing their names and place of origin and death.

Green writes about his mother very differently.²⁷⁵ He introduces her as yet unpublished memoir, *A Chronicle of Small Beer*,²⁷⁶ with a personal note on their relationship. He writes that he grew closer to her as she got older because the 'normal' mother-child relationship was broken when she went to Spain.²⁷⁷ Green felt that her warmth as a human being did not come across in her memoir²⁷⁸ because she concentrates on political aspects of her time in Spain. However, the great pride he feels in his mother's life is evident throughout and the desire that, again the story be told when he states that she wrote her memoirs at his request.

Although few in number, the work of relatives displays a filial pride, as well as a general interest in their family history a way in which to understand and put into context what their relatives achieved. Quite possibly Kitty wanted to achieve this with her poem written about the memory of the war seen through the eyes of the veterans. As an observer at countless reunions she writes,

And we who were not there join in, aware
 Their fading eyes show what we cannot hear,
 The ageless guilt which all survivors feel
 That they live on when friends and comrades fell.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*, verse 14, lines 51-55.

²⁷⁵ Nan Green was also in Spain as a medical administrator.

²⁷⁶ Nan Green, *A Chronicle of Small Beer*, unpublished ms, MML.

²⁷⁷ M. Green, Introduction to *A Chronicle of Small Beer*, p.7.

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.5.

²⁷⁹ Kitty, 'Brigaders' Reunion,' unpublished, 1998, lines 18-21.

We are taken into what she feels and thinks when standing silently around a memorial. 'Brigaders' Reunion' is the most personal and closest to the experience seen through the eyes of the veterans' family of all the pieces written by them.

There also exists in the family bibliography a library of prospective titles, yet to be written or made. A surprising number of the relatives sampled have expressed a wish to produce something on the veterans or the Brigade. A film director expressed a desire to make a documentary about the Brigaders to be shot in Spain.²⁸⁰ The son of one volunteer wants to write a novel, based on his family, with his father as the central character.²⁸¹ Another hopes to write a biography and a daughter has considered hiring a researcher to write her mother's life story.²⁸² The reason these projects have never been completed is down to time. Their own lives take priority over the International Brigade and the Spanish Civil War. The expression of the desire to contribute to the historiography of the British Battalion indicates the need to be heard even if for many it is as a representative of the volunteer relative.

The bibliography of the International Brigade is not alone in its dearth of generational studies that examine historically the effects of significant events on the families of those involved. Phil Cohen compiled a collection of interviews with the children of prominent CPGB members.²⁸³ It is one of the very few publications that has as its central subject the non-protagonist. The interviews cover the experiences of being brought up where politics was an integral part of family life and relationships. In Cohen's introduction he highlights the 'different inheritance' of children growing up during the demise of intense anti-fascist activity after World War Two.²⁸⁴ An interview with Martin Kettle describes how because the children became the bearers of an intense memory they had not experienced, as a consequence,

²⁸⁰ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998.

²⁸¹ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

²⁸² Interview with Lydia, 1 December 1998.

²⁸³ P. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution: Communist Childhood in Cold War Britain*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1997.

²⁸⁴ P. Cohen, *ibid.*, p.14.

All we got was the myth. It stopped us from being ourselves. It was an inhibition.²⁸⁵

It is interesting to note that there are no interviews with any of the children of International Brigaders, many of whom, were prominent and influential members of the Communist Party such as Nan Green, Thora Craig, Peter Kerrigan and Sam Wild. Kettle's response is one of the many similarities with the children of International Brigaders and the general feelings they have talked about in connection with their own communist childhood. This includes the burden of being the next generation of Communist Party members, the feeling of community with other children of communists and of being 'different' and set apart from the 'norm'. This is in addition to their conscious feeling of being the next generation of International Brigade memory.²⁸⁶

Conclusions

In formulating a concluding response to the expansive and varied literature written in the English language about the Spanish Civil War and the British Battalion we can identify some essential points. In a significant number of the sample of relatives who were interviewed there is an historical continuum. These relatives attach importance to the British members of the International Brigade by reading literature on the war and the volunteers. In some examples there is a sentimental attachment to 'things' Spanish - the country, the people, its culture, which is reflected in their reading. A political continuum exists where those interviewed identified with the Communist Party themselves. This is not as strong as on historical association.

The ideological focus of the early period of literature produced carries contentious and controversial theories of the conflict. With the death of Franco the British volunteers dominated these. Their interpretation that the war was about democracy against barbarity, as opposed to Communism versus Fascism, has become the definitive literary definition of the conflict. The official historians, representatives of

²⁸⁵ P. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, 1997, p.14.

²⁸⁶ Not all children of International Brigaders are conscious of their role as the bearers of IB memory. Many see it as an honour, rather than a heavy weight and others are not concerned at all either because it is not important to them or they do not wish to reflect on their parents' involvement in any conflict.

the International Brigade Association have for some years closely monitored all literary output on the Brigade and dominated many areas of the discourse.

A comparison with martial literature of the First World War found marked differences in the representation of the state fighter with the volunteer warrior. These are all related to the political nature of their engagement, suggesting that historiographically the Brigaders are foremost political agitators before warriors.

The official historians continue to emphasise their moral qualities, abstention from drink, solidarity with their comrades and dedication to the cause. They portray them primarily as fighters for freedom and volunteers for liberty. This vision is strongly defended against alternative and oppositional texts such as *Homage to Catalonia* and *Land and Freedom*. Their literary 'ideal' of the volunteer excludes fanciful accounts and any who do not come under the jurisdiction of the International Brigade.

In terms of the base instincts needed for survival, such as food, cigarettes and the acknowledgment of fear in combat situations, the human aspects predominate over politics.

The hegemony of the veteran-centred experience of the war, in all forms has meant that the presence of their relatives in the literature is quantitatively poor as we can expect. Writers and historians continue to analyse the veterans while ignoring the potential to investigate the impact of the civil war in both the public and private context. The importance of family experiences continues to be subdued by the International Brigade in all areas of discourse.

Despite the move towards oral histories, interviews with the protagonists and the quest for knowledge of their experiences, there is still limited understanding of the knock-on effect of traumatic life events, and a further human element is missing.

Also lacking is a satisfactory examination of how various influences have shaped the memory of the Spanish Civil War in Britain. Indeed, research into war memory instigated by Paul Fussell's comprehensive study of the Great War, not unlike oral history, is only a recent phenomenon and has remained confined to the First World War.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HERITAGE OF THE BRITISH BATTALION

The concept of the collective memory of the Spanish Civil War can be identified as the memory of the majority, strongly linked to and influenced by, the official way of remembering. The International Brigade Association (IBA), the official organisation of British civil war veterans, is not influenced by the traditional constraints of state remembrance that can affect other veteran organisations. Consequently they have almost complete control over the way the civil war is commemorated and memorialised in Britain. This event-centred focus, which underwent resurgence after Franco's death, has seen the development of a group that seeks to dominate all aspects of public remembrance and representation. The collective memory does not imply that the group experiences identical thought processes but that it operates very much in open expressions of remembrance, such as the way in which interested parties celebrate anniversaries, or gather around memorials, who does this and how they are influenced.

Constructing Remembrance

The construct of remembrance of the International Brigade and the Spanish Civil War has many similar features to state sanctioned memorialising of the two official world wars. These include, the erection of memorials to the fallen in towns and cities, an annual ceremony around the main cenotaph or statue, the importance of dates and the Silence. All elements are highly recognisable with the tradition of remembrance. However, in commemoration style, participation and sentiment, the memorialising of the civil war remains unique.

The triumph of anti-fascism with the end of the Second World War added weight to the Brigaders' conviction that it was their moral victory reinforced with the emergence of a democratic Spain after Franco's death. Therefore, it became necessary and desirable for them to publicly celebrate their involvement in the Spanish war. The date chosen as the start of the war (18 July) was symbolic because it was the beginning of (for the majority) the most significant and rewarding episode of their lives; a definitive moment when words and principles were put into action. It seemed fitting that the veterans chose to remember the beginning of hostilities and

their struggle as opposed to the end that saw them momentarily defeated. For the British veterans Jarama ‘their baptism of fire’ holds a terrible awe and collective pride. It too, like the Somme, is surrounded by myth with stories of courage and tragic loss. Jarama was the first major engagement of the British Battalion. Strategically it was important for the Fascists to cut the main Valencia road that linked the new Headquarters of the Republican Government with Madrid. Bill Alexander writes in the official history¹ that,

For seven hours, despite heavy losses, the British had held off a powerful attack by very much larger and better-equipped forces... though the Battalion was later involved in even more bloody encounters, Jarama was its first major trial. The facts show that it came through with a record of individual grit, courage and determination, which set standards for all its future fighting.²

The British lost 275 men out of 400 in three days of battle.³ One only has to study memorials listing the dead to see the physical impact that Jarama had on the British Battalion. Almost every plaque bearing the names of those killed has at least one who fell at Jarama. Outside of the annual South Bank meeting in July Jarama is the only British engagement to be remembered ceremonially.

Every year on a Saturday nearest to February 12, the anniversary of the Battle of Jarama (where the majority of local IBER's were killed) we meet at the plaque at noon for a reunion and short ceremony.⁴

From very early on Jarama was singled out as the definitive battle in their definitive war. A whole edition of the IBA magazine *The Volunteer for Liberty* was devoted to what would appear the innocuous seventh anniversary of Jarama. The name became synonymous with familiar nostalgic labels such as national pride that the British

¹ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982.

² *ibid.*, pp.97 & 101.

³ *ibid.*, p.97.

⁴ Letter from Ruth Frow, February 1998. Predominantly Manchester based veterans meet at Manchester Town Hall where there is a large plaque to the local volunteers.

never give in coupled with international solidarity in the laying down of so many lives for the salvation of another country. This is the official representation of Jarama playing down the accounts of veterans who spoke of chronic disorganisation with unnecessary loss of life and the many desertions.

Looking back it seems fantastic that not even the Brigade staff possessed maps of the area in which they proposed to fight a major action over steep country...⁵

Historians who have attempted to relate a fuller interpretation which includes both the heroism and the less romantic image have been criticised by the veterans' association. Thus Jarama is an integral part of the mythology of the British Battalion. Commemorations for the Fortieth anniversary in 1976 were very different to the celebrations for the Sixtieth in 1996. The end of totalitarian rule and the first tentative steps towards democracy in Spain saw a collective feeling of vindication amongst the veterans. Around this time statues and plaques began to appear. A first national monument, to Welsh Brigaders, was dedicated in January 1976 and sited inside the South Wales Miners' Library. The educational library and archive had been founded three years previously "to promote contemporary historical research and trade union and adult education."⁶ Following the Welsh plaque nearly ten years later came the official monument to the volunteers on the South Bank, London, dedicated to the 2,100 men and women who left Britain for Spain in service to the Republic. Its inauguration coincided with the Fiftieth anniversary of the start of the civil war precipitating an abundance of academic works, memoirs and twenty-eight memorials between 1986 and 1995.

The Sixtieth anniversary was altogether more jubilant and symbolic due partly to an offer of Spanish citizenship. None of the veterans took up the invitation because under Spanish law it would have meant relinquishing British citizenship. However, the offer was token recognition at last for the sacrifice they had made. On the whole relatives in the sample thought the Spanish government had made an important

⁵ J. Gurney, *Crusade in Spain*, 1974, p.101.

⁶ Programme from the ceremony dedicating the Welsh Memorial at the South Wales Miners' Library, 24 January 1976.

gesture.⁷ The hugely successful return to Spain in November 1996, simply entitled *Homanaje* – Homage, was a highly emotional and impressive spectacle, combining elements of myth, adoration, reflection and celebration. “[W]e had to walk along a pathway,” explained one wife, “lined with people and they were crying, clapping and coming up to kiss us...I just couldn’t get over the wave of emotion that they showed us...it was so moving.”⁸ Another spoke of the physical effect the trip had on them, “[a] lot of us were ill, it was so emotional.”⁹ For the family members that attended the Homage the intense emotional atmosphere helped many to feel closer or more a part of the experience that accompanied the solidarity that veterans had felt in Spain.

I mean not even having taken part in it, being too young to
understand I was still moved by the sentiments expressed
and how relevant they are today.¹⁰

In addition it spurred on Mark, who had the original idea for the Friends, together with the other founding members to set the organisation into motion. The intensity of the Homage together with Mark having experienced an element of ostracism made the founder members more determined to see their group get started.

For many it was the first opportunity to see where their relatives had fought and for some the possible place where they had died. The symbolism of the battlefields for the relations of veterans had become not places of memory but sites of imagining. They had reconstructed, with the visual stimulus of terrain and often with years of oral testimony or self-discovery through literature, the experience of their loved ones’ engagement. In effect visiting these sites was not a memory of experience but one of oral and symbolic recognition.

Visiting Sites of Memory

The now familiar practice of visiting sites of battle began immediately after the end of the Great War. The tours started as a means by which the bereaved, mainly

⁷ Information from the questionnaires of the relatives in the sample.

⁸ Interview with Jean, 23 June 1998.

⁹ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

¹⁰ Interview with Jean, 23 June 1998.

women and much later veterans, could visit where their loved ones and comrades had fallen. The British Legion and St. Barnabas Society organised the subsidised trips to Flanders especially for this purpose. Geoff Dyer describes them as sombre, comfortless affairs.¹¹ Later on came the 'package tours' to the battlefields of Normandy. By contrast many International Brigaders and their families had to wait until after Franco's death. The intervening forty years meant as Fussell describes, the revisiting of battle sites in memory only becoming as powerful an obligation as physically visiting them.¹² For the relatives they remained sites of imagining until individual trips could be made. Their subsequent journeys to Spain were made either with veterans or alone. None of the expeditions were in the traditional sense the pilgrimages that characterised World War One expeditions. In fact a couple of relatives were keen to point out that they felt uncomfortable with this idea, of trudging around battlefields in a ritualised, tourist fashion, such as those conducted around the Western Front. Mick explained he did not want to go for a "vicarious thrill"¹³ and Len believed it was "sentimental" to visit battlefields.¹⁴ For a few in the sample their visits were functional, visiting friends, holidaying and business trips. Those who travelled alone to Spain before Franco's death often felt uncomfortable or even guilty. Mick went on a musical tour in the sixties and his father told him he shouldn't have gone.¹⁵ Gwyn visiting Spain recently used a coach trip to Barcelona to educate fellow travellers about the civil war and his father's role.¹⁶ Two children, from different families in the sample, accompanied by the veterans on trips to Spain were not tempted to turn their trips into symbolic pilgrimages. These were opportunities to share with the Brigader their feeling of connection with a place.

In those three to four weeks we spoke quite a lot about Spain
in various ways and it was very interesting because my father
had been back to Spain a couple of times before with my
mother and this was the first and only time we'd been

¹¹ G. Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, 1994, p.103-104.

¹² P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 1975, p.327.

¹³ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹⁴ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998.

¹⁵ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹⁶ Interview with Gwyn, 11 August 1999.

together...on the trips with my mother it was more as a tourist to places around the coast...we both got a lot out of it. We saw the interior of Spain and my father being fluent in Spanish was a great asset, we had just such a wonderful time. It was very special.¹⁷

So for John it was an opportunity to learn more about his father as a person through his reactions and feelings towards the sites they visited. These trips illustrated the great affinity that some relatives have with Spain through the experiences of their parents. They were very much about sharing and being proud of their family history culminating in a real feeling of belonging to Spain.

Memorials in Stone

The role of the family in all aspects of remembrance has changed only slightly in the sixty years since the end of the war in Spain. As relatives had found themselves marginal in the volunteers' decision to leave for Spain, likewise they played, until recently, only a small public role in remembering those lost. With the re-emergence of the civil war into the public domain the veterans have dominated the organisation of ceremonial events. However within the last five years family have begun to take an active part in campaigning for memorials to their relatives. Of the four memorials directly instigated by relatives three were set up after the 60th anniversary in 1996.¹⁸ The formation of the Friends association after the Homanaje in Spain could have heralded a perceptible change in how the family saw their role; coupled with the realisation that the veterans were steadily finding it more and more difficult to manage their own memorialising.

Yet no other country has honoured the Brigaders with such enthusiasm in stone as Britain. The first of only two American monuments dedicated to the Abraham Lincoln Battalion was erected at Seattle University in 1999.¹⁹ In Britain 1975 was the

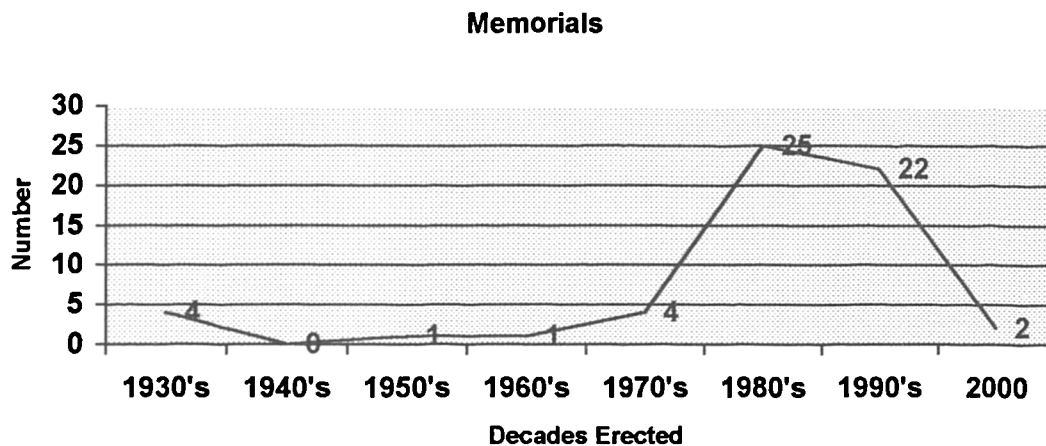
¹⁷ Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

¹⁸ Dora in Hammersmith & Fulham, Harold in South Wales and Gwyn in Merthyr Tydfil.

¹⁹ Friends Newsletter, No. 4, July 1999. A second has since appeared in Madison, Wisconsin on 31 October 1999. Their reticence has been due to their paranoia during the Cold War and continuing fear of Communism. However, this does not explain why France only dedicated her first monument in October 1999 in Champigny a suburb of Paris. Friends Newsletter No. 5, not dated.

watershed year in terms of civil war memory. Prior to Franco's death there were only six memorials dotted about the country. Of these one had been stolen from a private house in the 1960's and turned up by chance in the 1980's.²⁰ Another was erected in a Swindon Cemetery in the style of a traditional headstone.²¹ A third was a seat dedicated to the communist writer and activist Ralph Fox who had been killed in Spain.²²

Table 2a



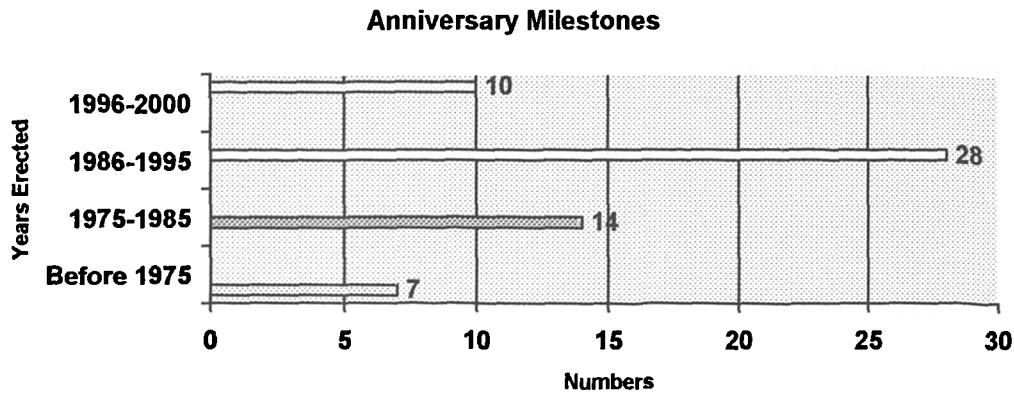
Source mainly elaborated from *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996.

²⁰ This first of its kind plaque now resides at Middlesbrough Town Hall. It was stolen in the 1960's and found by a teacher in 1983 in a junk-yard in Acton, West London. Alexander et al., *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.73-74. The fact that it had been kept at a private house and was not on public display suggests civic buildings were not sympathetic to displaying it due to Cold War hysteria regarding Communism.

²¹ The headstone was dedicated to Percy Williams killed at Caspe in March 1938. It was commissioned by Swindon Amalgamated Electricians Union (AEU) members in 1939 and sited at Whitworth Road Cemetery, Swindon., *ibid.* p.120-121.

²² The plaque was dedicated in Halifax, April 1950. *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.86-88.

Table 2b



Source mainly elaborated from *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996.

The scarcity of commemorative stones before 1975 can be attributed to a number of factors. General Franco did not die until November 1975 and whilst the International Brigade Association continued to oppose his regime from Britain concern for the Spanish people was their main priority. Although their involvement was well-known within the labour movement the politically inactive among the general public, well versed perhaps in the meanings of the Second World War and beginning to enjoy the Balearics and the Costa del Sol knew little, if anything, about the Spanish Civil War and its significance for Europe. Veterans were all too aware of this. James Allbrighton writing to Bill Alexander shortly before his death declared,

I have noticed that many of the young people with whoever
I come into contact, have no idea or even a clue to what I am
talking about when I mention the Spanish Civil War.²³

Finally, the regime's suppression of discussion about the war, the destruction of much documentary material and the ban on anything other than state regulated literature in Spain made for a situation not conducive for the conditions of international debate to thrive.

²³ Letter from James Allbrighton to Bill Alexander, dated 26 July 1982. Box 50, A1/5, International Brigade Collection, Marx Memorial Library (MML), London.

After Franco's death, especially in the years since 1986, (the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the war) a memorial has been dedicated in most cities and some towns and villages to the people who volunteered to fight for democracy in Spain. Between the 50th and 60th anniversary (1986-1995) twenty-eight²⁴ memorials have been conceived, donations collected, artists commissioned and monuments erected. Achieving this realisation was more protracted and complicated than the erection and dedication of First World War memorials. When the War Office banned the returning of war dead to Britain in 1915, Moriarty states that, "the many thousands of local memorials provided sites to which memory could attach itself."²⁵ They became a place where a nation of wives, children and parents could collectively grieve. The five hundred and twenty-six²⁶ who died in Spain remained where they were cut down for different reasons. This was an 'unofficial war,' swiftly followed by a nationally recognised war that directly involved Britain. For this reason, grief for the numerically few, was swallowed up by the ensuing war against Hitler and the preoccupation of defending Britain from a Nazi invasion. The public memory and bereavement became suppressed by events, by the media and to a certain extent by the relatives themselves, who were left with little outlet for their grievances. Grief and remembering in this stance were private not public affairs. So there were very few opportunities or sites for memory in the two decades after the Civil War.

When Spain became fully democratic again in 1981 and interest was allowed to flourish, war memorials began to appear in greater numbers, as a way of reintroducing Spain's civil war to the public consciousness. However, this was not a result of the relatives' need for a place to remember and grieve but the evidence suggests that political organisations and the wider labour movement inspired it. District and City Councils (which included Rhondda Borough Council, Leeds City Council, the Greater London Council and Reading Borough Council) instigated the most memorials and contributed to the financing of many others. These were

²⁴ The plaque at SOGAT (Society of Graphical and Allied Trades) headquarters in Rottingdean was rededicated in 1986, the original date of dedication is unknown. *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.123.

²⁵ Basically a place where people could grieve those lost in the Great War. Evans, M. & Lunn, K. (eds.) *War & Memory in the Twentieth Century*, 1997, p.126.

²⁶ Richard Baxell is disputing this total in his prospective history thesis on the social and political composition of the British Battalion, London School of Economics. Forthcoming.

unsurprisingly councils predominantly controlled by left-wing groupings. **Table 2c** shows that the trade union movement and general labour movement contributed to over half of the memorials; further evidence that the public commemoration of the Civil War was very much the preserve of left-wing political groups and democratic organisations. It coincided with the zenith of the Conservative government's onslaught upon trade union rights and rate capping of left-wing councils. The memorials have become for the labour movement something they at last could feel justly proud of and willing to publicise. Spain was fully democratic, the actions of the volunteers were vindicated, and the moral if not military victory could at last be

Table 2c

Instigation for Memorials

Instigation for Memorials	Number
General Labour Movement ²⁷	11
Trade Unions	8
Trade Councils	2
District/County/City Councils & Councillors	14
Political Parties ²⁸	3
International Brigaders	5
Family	4
Local People	6
Museum	1
Others ²⁹	6

Source mainly elaborated from *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996. Statistics were updated as memorials continued to appear after 1996.

²⁷ General Labour Movement represents a conglomeration of the trade union movement and local labour movement.

²⁸ The three individual parties were the Labour Party, the Communist Party and Plaid Cymru.

²⁹ 'Others' included actors from the Unity Theatre, the Stroud Football Poets, Kilarney Republican Graves Association, work colleagues and a church.

celebrated and remembered publicly. It was a political irony that in October 1985 one of the last and most enduring achievements of the threatened Greater London Council (GLC) was to preside over the unveiling of the International Brigade memorial in Jubilee Gardens. The GLC were involved in contributing to the International Brigade Appeal along with the labour and trade union movement and were instrumental in securing a prestigious site for the statue outside of their Headquarters on the South Bank. The statue both literally and symbolically could be viewed as a giant fist to Thatcherism as well as fascism and a lasting impression of the achievements of the British left.

There is limited evidence to suggest that the relatives of men killed in Spain used the belated erection of memorials as a place to mourn the dead. Owen rarely visits memorials but Harold, Mark and Susie may also combine their fairly regular attendances at commemorations with remembering those they lost in Spain. Nigel referred to the possible personal use of sites. "These celebrations aren't important to me, possibly because I didn't lose anyone in the war."³⁰ The majority use of the memorials displays a public not private function.

Despite the potentially symbolic use of memorials for private grief, relatives have featured in very few instances of commissioning memorials. One relative interviewed talked of her role in having a memorial erected to the men from Hammersmith & Fulham. "We had great battles over that."³¹ She encountered difficulties spanning from, trying to find the names of men who had actually gone from the area, to finding a site for the memorial. Gwyn was instrumental in the dedication of the plaque to men who went from his home district including his father as his letter to the local newspaper illustrates.

Your paper published a letter from the men of Merthyr who went to fight in Spain in the 30's. One of these men was never to return. It is, I believe, time that Merthyr took note of this sacrifice and all that heroism. With that end I am having a wooden plaque carved that will list their names.³²

³⁰ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

³¹ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998

³² Letter from Gwyn to Editor of the *Merthyr Express*, 28 February 1995.

Gwyn enlisted the help of the *Merthyr Express* in publicising and seeking relatives of men who went to Spain from the area. The plaque was eventually presented to the curator of the Cyfartha museum in Merthyr Tydfil in a ceremony that took place in February 1996. However this kind of intervention from relatives is rare, their involvement usually reduced to an invitation to the opening ceremonies. Whilst organisers of the memorial at Leicester sought in vain to trace family of the three Leicester men killed in Spain, the son of a well-known doctor living only a few miles from the unveiling of a plaque in South Wales was overlooked.³³ This is why the work of Harold, who lost his eldest brother at Brunete, appears so extraordinary. Harold began campaigning for more memorials to be erected to Welsh volunteers long after retirement. A Spanish Civil War exhibition and a photo of his brother taken in Spain that he'd never seen before belatedly initiated his interest. He began by taking the display around towns and villages in Wales, proudly explaining that since 1995 it had been booked up every month. A local newspaper described how Harold was keeping alive the memory of the Welsh volunteers by touring around with his exhibition. He is also assembling an archive, mainly of press cuttings. In addition Harold has successfully campaigned for several new memorials³⁴ explaining,

There's only two places left [without a plaque] and I've written to [the]...council down there. I haven't had an answer but what I'll do I'm not happy talking down the end of a phone I like to go down there. And I keep going down there until I get hold of somebody. Even if they're in meetings I hassle them...Hywel Francis said to me, 'you won't be happy until you get a plaque for them all.' 'No I won't be happy,' I said.³⁵

Not satisfied with these achievements he tenaciously set about campaigning to the Welsh Office for a national memorial, despite two existing Welsh plaques bearing

³³ Interview with Dora, 22 October 1998.

³⁴ Ones at Porthcawl, Burry Port and Ammanford. There will also shortly be a commemorative plaque to his brother on a bridge in his birth village of Mardy.

³⁵ Interview with Harold, 30 March 1999.

the names of all those killed in Spain.³⁶ Firstly Harold feels a central focus of remembrance is needed but more importantly the names of all the Welsh volunteers must be immortalised. Existing plaques and stones or the memorial stone at Cardiff, bearing no names, which Harold sees as pathetic, has not achieved this. His attempts for a Welsh monument have so far been unsuccessful. Implicit in the Welsh Office spokesman's response, "we do not feel that a crown building is the best place for this type of memorial,"³⁷ was still the subversive element of the volunteers' decision to fight against the wishes of the British Government. In spite of Harold's crusade on behalf of the Welsh Brigaders, the experiences and contributions of relations to civil war memorials are disparate, dependant on the subjectivity of the individual's feelings and involvement in the processes of remembering the war.



Ken Livingstone speaking at the International Brigade memorial service, July 1998.

(Photograph donated by Susie)

³⁶ At Swansea, South Wales Miners' Library and Burry Port.

³⁷ 'Let's honour our civil war heroes,' *Western Mail*, 2 December 1997.

The call for World War One memorials was official and public. Most of the money raised for local stones was from people who lived in the locality. In contrast the contributions of local people to Spanish Civil War memorials make up less than a tenth and these were predominantly to commemorate individual Brigaders. In April 1985, the people of Rotherham placed a memorial plaque on a bench to Tommy James. Not only had he been a member of the International Brigade but he had also fought in the Great War, was a local leader during the General Strike 1926, a public agitator and president of the Rotherham Trades Council. However, his contribution as a volunteer is particularly singled out for the obelisk erected to commemorate his achievements was dedicated on the fiftieth anniversary of the election of the Popular Front government in Spain (February 1986).³⁸ In contrast, a small north Welsh village chose a different way to remember one of their community, a young man called George Fretwell, killed at Jarama in 1937. The idea came from some of the people who had grown up with him. It took a number of years to come to fruition. At the time of George's death the village had been divided. Some viewed his actions as heroic whilst others saw his death as a tragic waste of life. The International Brigade official memorial book states that the community was brought together over his death by the decision to dedicate a plaque.³⁹ It is particularly interesting if indeed the memorial did have healing properties that a contested memory could be smoothed over by the very public symbol of a memorial.

One of the most recent individual memorials was organised by a local performance group The Stroud Football Poets. Two Pyrenean Oaks were planted alongside a small plaque to Thomas Duncombe, a Wooten-under-Edge man, killed in Spain. The Poets travel around the country performing their repertoire of left-wing poems and songs, which includes an acclaimed production of *No Pasaran!* So their links with the remembrance of the civil war are strong. No family were present at the ceremony, as attempts to trace them had proved unsuccessful.

If the aesthetics of memorials are examined again there is a complete contrast to World War One stones. Only four memorials to the volunteers are statues or

³⁸ Alexander et al., *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.89-91.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.67.

sculptures.⁴⁰ (See **Appendix Seven**) The common theme of these embodies suffering, sacrifice, the struggle for freedom made by the volunteers and defiance. Thus they signify the motifs of the collective memory yet are contemporary in style, smooth with the intertwined flowing representations of grief and sacrifice, together with the wounded and defiant resistance. The South Bank memorial is described thus, "...the four powerful figures hold up a wounded kneeling form, their free arms stretch up high above their heads – two with open palms in the act of fending off to protect, and two fists clenched, expressing defiant resistance."⁴¹ As many years have passed between the end of the war and the erection of the memorial these are the images and symbols of the struggle that have become popular in civil war literature.

The most common form of dedication are the plaques with veterans' names inscribed. These comprise a third of all memorials. The decision to name volunteers lies with different organisations, from individual Brigaders wishing to have fallen friends acknowledged to proud councils and trade unionists.⁴² Only those volunteers associated with the British Battalion of the International Brigade are commemorated. There is no religious iconography such as crosses notable in First World War monuments as many of the volunteers were secular.⁴³

Without exception, the sites of civil war memorials reflect either the politics or the guiding principles of the International Brigade. (See **Appendix Seven continuation**) Monuments situated in the open air are usually in a designated 'peace' area, a garden, or peace walk being the most common place. They tend to be set a little apart from the memorials of the World Wars, reflecting that this was a very different conflict. In Leicester the civil war plaque was placed on Peace Walk and is dwarfed by the imposing memorial to the world war dead approximately 250 yards away. There was also the contested place of the International Brigade memorial in London. The sites of the monuments are extremely important within the whole construct of

⁴⁰ Excluding the South Bank International Brigade memorial.

⁴¹ *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.5.

⁴² Of the most recent wave of memorials dedicated after the sixtieth anniversary the majority have been ceremonial plaques with names: Burry Port, February 1997, Ammanford, November 1998, Lewisham, February 1999 and Porthcawl, October 1999.

⁴³ However, there is one example, the memorial to one volunteer is a Red Stole (clergy scarf) embroidered with the symbol of the International Brigade. This is worn at the volunteer's local church called St. Luke's in Peckham, London.

remembrance and memory of the civil war and recently the International Brigade Association succeeded in keeping the statue at its existing site in Jubilee Gardens. Many were concerned that it would be moved because of the London Eye Ferris wheel and other developments in the area.

They [the South Bank Board] propose that the International Brigade memorial be placed in a "secluded garden." This would be most unsuitable – not seen by passers by and subject to vandalism.⁴⁴

However, others within the veterans' association would have preferred it to be moved to a place of safety within the grounds of the Imperial War Museum. The protests against this reflect the desire to keep the memory of the civil war separate from the remembrance of other wars and the statue remains at Jubilee Gardens.⁴⁵

Of the indoor memorials many were placed in civic centres mainly town halls. These establishments would generally have been instrumental in arranging the memorial; judging by the presence of Mayors and other local dignitaries at the dedication ceremonies. Many dignitaries took great civic pride in unveiling plaques and showing their city or borough's contribution to anti-fascism. In this display of civic pride the listing and naming of individuals who fell and those who returned is important. On village world war memorials the names of the lost acted like a gravestone for the relatives, it was a place where they could mourn. The state used the naming of names as a device to individualise the soldier. It has been all too easy to homogenise the thousands of men killed, particularly in the imagery and the facts that surround battle such as the Somme. This uniformity is not the case with Spanish Civil War tributes. Over half have the names of men and women who volunteered whilst others simply bear witness to the fact that there were volunteers who went to Spain from a certain locality. Also by nature of the fact that they were volunteers and not conscripted, the names of those who returned are also inscribed, marking out their actions as special and different.

⁴⁴ International Brigade Association Newsletter, 1998, p.1.

⁴⁵ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998. A blew up dispute between the Secretary of the IBA, who wanted it to stay where it was, and the Chairman who believed it was safest being moved to within the grounds of the Imperial War Museum.

Individuals were often responsible for the organisers' decision to include names. In the five instances where International Brigaders have been the inspiration behind memorials, names of volunteers have been included. It is obvious here that veterans are desirous of remembering fallen comrades and having their own individual sacrifice made public. Also where relatives played a major part names have been important. The son of a fallen Brigader unveiled the memorial with his father's name on in Hull.⁴⁶ One of the more recently erected memorials to volunteers in Hammersmith & Fulham was organised with assistance from the daughter of one of those named. Much time was spent collecting the names of those who went across the two boroughs. However, it was suggested by a member of the International Brigade Association (IBA) that no names should appear on the marble plaque. But the daughter stated that it had become important to have her father's name and those who went alongside him inscribed.⁴⁷

There are nine memorials that do not bear individual names.⁴⁸ These include, Sheffield, Greater Manchester, Glasgow and Birmingham. The Manchester and Glasgow memorials are particularly impressive. The former placed in the Town Hall carries the legendary speech of La Pasionaria to the departing Brigaders. In Glasgow a statue of her appears with defiant arms uplifted to the sky. Both of these memorials chose to enhance the legendary status of the volunteers as a heroic collective of brothers and sisters.

The inscriptions on the memorials exemplify the myths that have grown up around the civil war and the words that symbolise the mythologizing of the war and its volunteers. In most cases the monuments were erected many years after the end of the conflict. This has given the names of battles, the words of speeches, songs and poetry time to become deeply entwined with the war, in turn becoming powerful images and symbols loaded with years of memory, emotion and reinterpretation. In stark contrast the memorials of the Great War were quickly commissioned. The enormity and horror of the 1914-18 conflict left room for the only response to be that of never forgetting what had happened. They are inscribed with the words,

⁴⁶ *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.100.

⁴⁷ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

⁴⁸ Including the South Bank memorial.

'memory,' 'remember.' The word 'remembrance' – 'the keeping of a thing in mind' has become the sacred word that symbolises the First World War and the 11th November. The inscriptions of civil war memorials are different. They do not instruct us to remember as the Great War monuments command. Instead the memorials often use the word 'commemorate' asking us to reflect in the ceremonial. It is a call to remember by a solemn act rather than a dig at our consciences never to forget at any cost. It is passive or voluntary as opposed to the assertive. The word 'commemorate' has also been carefully chosen to illustrate the amount of time elapsed since the event and how remembering the war has been unwittingly suppressed publicly for many years. Thus the words 'to commemorate' appearing on ten of the memorials links the memory of the conflict to the act of remembering by the ceremony. Of the ten, the earliest was dedicated over forty years after the war ended. Public displays of remembrance are important for reaffirming the role of the International Brigade in British labour history, in addition to gathering the veterans together to meet up and reminisce.

Inscriptions which closely follow the traditional Great War memorials in their wording are those inscribed 'to the memory,' 'in memory of,' 'honours the,' 'dedicated to.' These make up one third of the dedications. The memorial to volunteers in South Wales at the South Wales Miners' Library holds the words 'to the immortal memory.'⁴⁹ Interestingly, memorials at Cardiff, Aberdare, Penygroes, and the Rhondda⁵⁰ are inscribed with the phrases most attributed to 'official' war monuments. The civil war and the contribution of volunteers from Wales, particularly the coal mining areas of the south meant a lot to the Welsh. It was a necessary and political gesture as well as an act of solidarity with the workers of Spain. Thus the memorials of Wales have come to symbolise a public display of the struggles for social justice by the Welsh in Wales and beyond quite unique to their history and culture.

The mythology and romantic tradition of Spain's war is also exemplified in many memorials. The words 'No Pasaran!' are inscribed onto six memorials.⁵¹ No Pasaran!

⁴⁹ *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.60.

⁵⁰ Information on memorials from *ibid.*,

⁵¹ At Aberdare, St. Helens, Birmingham, Leicester, Dundee and Camden.

has come to symbolise the heroic defence of Madrid in late 1936 and early 1937 and become a by-word for the desperate fight to save democracy in Spain. Poetry is also popular, particularly from Byron who had fought in the Greek War of Independence in the 1820's. "Yet freedom! Yet thy banner torn, but flying, Streams like the thunder-storm against the wind!" This is heavy with the images of the struggle for liberty and democracy. It appears on the South Bank statue and on the stone at Sheffield.⁵² A different quotation from Byron was used on the plaque at Prestonpans in Scotland.⁵³ Thus Byron encapsulates part of the romantic imagery of the freedom fighter in civil war memory. Another much quoted poem 'The Volunteer' by C. Day Lewis, "they went because their open eyes could see no other way." The lines appear again on the monument in Jubilee Gardens and at Oldham.⁵⁴ Its evocative incantation conjures up the amazing foresight of the volunteers. For those with whom it is important not to forget it draws remembrance in the same way Binyon's 'going down of the sun' enthralls a nation's consciousness of its war dead. The words 'no other way' have also been used as titles for an autobiography and a memoir.⁵⁵ The phrase symbolises the clear and inevitable path that the volunteers felt impelled to take. Other phrases that have become inscribed in civil war mythology and appear on some memorials are 'to defend liberty,' (Middlesbrough) 'struggle for freedom,' (Oldham) 'defend democracy,' (Cardiff) and 'returned to fight fascism' (Leeds). Terms such as these immortalised on tablets of stone represent what the war meant to the volunteers. In official publications of the Brigade association and in the thoughts and ideas of veterans and relations they are what it stood for.

Steeped in the legends and mythology of the civil war is the speech of La Pasionaria to the departing International Brigaders in October 1938. The full speech appears on the memorial in Manchester Town Hall. Her words were spoken to create and uphold legends and heroes. The names of the battles have also become symbols of the conflict evoking memories for the veterans, Jarama being, as we saw, the most powerful. Again the battle names appear on the Manchester plaque and also by the names of the fallen to immortalise their memory and give further credence to their

⁵² *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, pp.7 and 95.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.35.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.82.

⁵⁵ *No Other Way*, 1981, by Richard Felstead and *There's No Other Way*, 1980, by Frank Deegan.

actions. It has the form of a traditional headstone for those who fell, as it becomes further individualised by acknowledging where they died.

The ritual of ceremony in remembering the dead is well practised in Britain. Remembrance Sunday, Armistice Day, the Last Post, 'at the going down of the sun,' conjure images of the old and young standing respectfully for two minutes and the placing of wreaths of poppies. It is a very public display but also a deeply private one. For the public silence holds many private memories. However, as veterans pass away and become fewer others that meet to pay their respects are not remembering first hand experience but those passed on by family, by institutions and what they have read in books, newspapers and seen on television – a constructed memory of war. The original use of the state memorial may eventually become lost as inevitably fewer people are mourning those lost in war, or associating the stones as places to mourn individuals.

Civil war remembrance ceremonies also give the opportunity to remember publicly, as veterans get fewer, younger generations can imagine in their silences. One relative however assigned the use of civil war memorials along with those given to World War stones. "I don't think there's any point in me turning up at memorials for the Spanish Civil War. These celebrations aren't important to me possibly because I didn't lose anyone in the War."⁵⁶ This is accentuated by a relative who had lost someone in Spain. She wanted more places where flowers could be left demonstrating a desire to have a space to privately mourn⁵⁷

The annual gatherings on the nearest Saturday to 18 July at the South Bank memorial exemplifies the key elements of ceremonial remembrance of the civil war in this country. As well as being reflective, in calling to mind the sacrifices and foresight of those who volunteered, it also looks to continue the traditions of anti-fascism and progressive thought. So the mixture of old and new are combined by a minute's silence and the singing of Alex McDade's 'There's a Valley in Spain Called Jarama,' with the speaker usually a left-wing political figure. The choice of speaker for the July 1998 gathering was Ken Livingstone, described by the late Chairman of the

⁵⁶ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

⁵⁷ Questionnaire BBq, 1997.

International Brigade Association (IBA) as 'Our Number One Fan'⁵⁸ because of his work in setting up and securing a place for the statue. He spoke not only of the past achievements of the volunteers but also of the threat to the site of the memorial by the London Eye Ferris Wheel, hoping those who were going round on the wheel, would see the memorial and wonder what it was.

The variety of left-wing political organisations that have been involved in commissioning memorials has surprisingly remained for the most part unaffected by traditional left schisms, particularly as the subject remains so contentious. For example, the appeal to the left in Leicester from the Leicester Secular Society ran thus, "We also offer to all Socialists, anarchists and trade unionists this opportunity to donate money, and so become part of this salute to our gallant comrades."⁵⁹ Ironically a dispute broke out between politicians over the financing of a plaque at Burry Port, South Wales. The argument escalated into a slanging match, with political and nationalist overtones, between Liberal Party and Plaid Cymru councillors.⁶⁰ It is surprising there were not more incidents of this kind between political rivals. Yet the labour movement remains united on this particular aspect of remembrance. Once councils had initiated ideas labour movement organisations contributed substantial amounts.

Although veterans featured prominently in ceremonial aspects of commemoration, few unveiled plaques. An exception was Jack Jones, an important figure in the labour movement and an ex-International Brigader. He was able to combine political significance with identification of the cause. Family were rarely asked to unveil memorials. In the three instances in which they took part (Hull, Penygroes and Porthcawl) their relatives had been killed in Spain. This was highly suggestive of an appeal to the emotions, a living reminder that real sacrifices were made in the cause of Spanish democracy. The most popular choice was the Mayor or Lord Provost.

⁵⁸ Len Crome addressing the crowd at the 1998 memorial gathering, South Bank.

⁵⁹ Leaflet of the Leicester Socialist Centre, 1986.

⁶⁰ Liberal Democratic councillor Keith Evans opposed the idea of a plaque at Burry Port on the grounds of cost, explaining that as the plaque was to contain the names of all Welsh victims, it should be a nation wide appeal. He accused Plaid Cymru of hypocrisy having been shouted down as a fascist and a Nazi. Plaid Cymru in turn played the nationalist card by accusing Evans of vetoing everything Welsh. Local Newspaper unknown, 'Battle waged over £500 Spanish Civil War memorial plan,' undated.



Dedication of Merthyr Tydfil plaque, April 1999. Attended by the Mayor and Mayoress, Lance Rogers and Iori Williams.

(Photograph donated by Lance Rogers)

The Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Bridgend were extremely proud to preside over the dedication of a plaque to a fallen volunteer at Porthcawl Grand Pavilion, where his son, who had taken a keen interest in the moves to have one dedicated, pulled the ceremonial curtain to reveal the plaque.

In keeping alive the memory of the British International Brigaders, the memorials publicly erected only ask us voluntarily to remember. The unusual images and plaques of names and strange sounding places attract in turn the dwindling numbers of veterans, some of their relations, people of the political left, some scholars and sadly sometimes neo-fascist vandalism. The act of remembering the civil war, "...the

hypnotic spell of Remembrance,”⁶¹ is not institutionalised or indelibly imprinted on our national consciousness. Remembrance Sunday, on the other hand, is “[c]onstantly reiterated, the claim that we [were] in danger of forgetting [and] one of the ways in which the [Great] War ensured it would be remembered.”⁶² When and if people remember the Spanish conflict it is because they choose to voluntarily. The political left has enthusiastically championed the memorials because after forty years they are proud to have it known some of their own were proved right about the decision to fight for Spanish democracy. The memorials have also been a cause of civic pride for the veterans. The monuments for many of the families and volunteers are public recognition of what they have privately thought and known for many years.

However, official history and the influence of the International Brigade Association have dominated this aspect of public memory. Only volunteers who were members of the International Brigade are commemorated on civil war memorials. Although the South Bank monument remembers all of those who left Britain’s shores – the statue is dedicated to the International Brigade numbering the 2,100 total of volunteers including medical staff, pointedly excluding the forty who volunteered under the Independent Labour Party.

The Relatives and Public Memory

After examining how relatives in the sample publicly and freely express remembrance of the civil war it was thought instructive to analyse their responses to specific questions on the questionnaires. Question 16 asking family members to think about the place of the International Brigade and the Spanish Civil War can be linked to Question 19 on the contemporary debates surrounding the Brigade, in this example, the offer of Spanish citizenship. (See **Appendix One**) The link between Question 17 on how much of the Spanish Civil War is still alive and Question 20 on whether a more widespread and official remembrance day should be introduced illustrates how the respondents feel the general public see the conflict. Finally questions 18 and 21 are useful in terms of reconstructing how the families place

⁶¹ G. Dyer, *The Missing of the Somme*, 1994, p.7.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.18.

themselves and their own individual ideas about keeping the memory of the civil war and the International Brigade alive. The following provides an analysis of the common themes of these collective responses.

There were three distinct areas to the answers for, 'the place of the International Brigade and civil war,' - Question 16. Firstly, the historical significance of the conflict and the Brigaders. This was the most popular theme among mainly politicised relatives and included general left-wing historical thought on the significance of Spain to the start of World War Two. The role of appeasement and the British and French governments in non-intervention also feature strongly in their responses to the civil war's historical place. Introduced by some was the emotive concept of Spain as Hitler's dress rehearsal. Two relatives extrapolated all of these ideas in their answers.

Fascist powers used Spain as a testing-ground – if allies had been as clear about significance of Spanish Civil War as Axis powers they would have stopped appeasing them and supported the Republic. The price Europe and the world paid was WW2.⁶³

...a most important place...if Britain and her allies had supported Spain at that time then the Second World War may never have happened – a testing-ground for what came after.⁶⁴

For those in the sample who placed Spain and the Brigade in historical terms the civil war remains of central importance within European events of the 1930's and not a peripheral conflict of little significance to the start of World War Two. Overwhelmingly their responses mirror veterans' attitudes about the importance of the conflict in European politics.

The second most popular set of answers identify most strongly with the International Brigaders and their principled stand against the spread of fascism. They were largely the most subjective responses, displaying close allegiance with the heroic aspects of their relatives' engagement. One relative felt proud that both her husband and her

⁶³ Questionnaire of Pam, 1998.

⁶⁴ Questionnaire of GGq, 1999.

brother had, “ played a part in helping the people of Spain.”⁶⁵ Many reiterated the language and terminology that has become associated with the Brigade, “for the pursuit of freedom,”⁶⁶ an “example of people fighting for a cause in which there was no personal gain,”⁶⁷ “young people from all over the world felt impelled to risk their lives to defend freedom against fascism,”⁶⁸ and the “bravest and most heroic of people...prepared to sacrifice their lives.”⁶⁹ A very few responses reflected their own concerns about how much remained ambiguous and unanswered by historians.

Largely neglected and probably better known through works
of fiction than factual accounts.⁷⁰

Overall respondents showed clear, enlightened opinions about the place of the war and the Brigades, identifying closely with the historical and emotional stance of the veterans.

Likewise the majority were strongly in agreement that the offer of Spanish citizenship (Question 19), although it was unlikely to be taken up by veterans, was an important gesture.⁷¹ If this clear response is compared with the less emphatic indicators for Question 20, a separate remembrance day, illustrated that many of the sampled relatives have a close emotional association with Spain, in terms of how the Brigaders are seen. This may be linked to their presence at the 1996 Homanaje. All of those who attended the celebration agreed or agreed strongly that it was an important gesture. However the less unanimous agreement for a ‘special Remembrance Day’ of the civil war, suggested that issues around public commemoration in Britain are more ambiguous. Can this be linked to the general awareness of Britain’s official reaction to the Spanish Civil War; the betrayal of a democratically elected government and therefore a subconscious desire to keep public remembrance part of the left tradition and separate from popular and state-led

⁶⁵ Questionnaire of Susie, 1998.

⁶⁶ Questionnaire of Jimmy, 1998.

⁶⁷ Questionnaire of Ellen, 1998.

⁶⁸ Questionnaire of Alfred, 1998.

⁶⁹ Questionnaire of FFq, 1999.

⁷⁰ Questionnaire of Neil, 1999. Other responses “significant working-class event not accurately understood.” Questionnaire of Mick, 1999. “under understood,” Questionnaire of Ray, 1999.

⁷¹ Nine respondents agreed and 21 strongly agreed that it was an important gesture.

commemoration? That is why Pam stated that the labour movement should control any integrated remembrance day. One relative saw the South Bank gathering as his or her own official remembrance day.⁷² Others believed it was an impossibility and so thinking about it was academic, or that it should just be left alone. So despite a small majority strongly agreeing with the statement, it seemed to present numerous ideological problems for some of those asked, as far more had no opinion or disagreed.

People were much easier about thinking of the public memory on a more subjective level. Two people misunderstood Question 17 (Ray and Len) perhaps due to the way it was phrased. 'How much of the Spanish Civil War is alive today?' Others believed the memory of the war remained alive through cultural reminders, such as literature and also as an emotive symbol or set of principles. About half of those who referred to public memory felt the war was still alive, especially among the older generation and the other half believed there was very little left of the war.

Few older people keeping the memory alive. I think once they die the Spanish Civil War will be lost in time.⁷³

However, younger respondents were more hopeful that those born long after the war would continue to remember, "recent films [*Land & Freedom*] have recreated interest among younger people,"⁷⁴ and that the Brigaders' example, "lives on in the struggles of subsequent generations."⁷⁵ For those who see the volunteers as a symbol for freedom against oppression, despite their awareness of the negative re-emergence of fascism, they are positive in their belief that the volunteers will inspire younger generations. "Fascist ideals appeal once more,"⁷⁶ "I think the issues of freedom v oppression will always exist...the Spanish Civil War will remain an emotive symbol,"⁷⁷ "the spirit continues."⁷⁸ The Brigade and the civil war are held not only as

⁷² Questionnaire of Mark, 1998.

⁷³ Questionnaire of Stephen, 1999.

⁷⁴ Questionnaire of Edgar, 1999.

⁷⁵ Questionnaire of John, 1998.

⁷⁶ Questionnaire of Pam, 1998.

⁷⁷ Questionnaire of Nigel, 1999.

⁷⁸ Questionnaire of Joe, 1999.

public or physical reminders of remembrance but equally as a set of principles or an emotive symbol.

The final combination of questions (18 and 21) asks respondents about the place of the families in the memory of the war merging both public and private; how they propose to keep the remembrance alive and the importance of family heritage. The largest diversity of answers has appeared for Question 18 because it asks for an interpretation of an individual's position. All but a few had thought of ways in which they could contribute to the memory even if they believed these were rather vague.

Only through personal contact and conversation of interested persons.⁷⁹

The most obvious expressions of their place in the memory were privately by talking within the family.

By talking about his involvement to my children as and when appropriate.⁸⁰

I tell my friends and relatives and children about my uncle.⁸¹

However, more relatives saw themselves as disseminating the memory publicly or at least seeing this as important.

Schools and colleges should make it an integral part of their history teaching.⁸²

or lectures and books being made available at colleges. Especially important to members of the Friends was their work within the organisation. For them setting up Friends was judged as essential to keeping the memory alive.⁸³ The idea of private family remembrance was particularly strong in the responses to Question 21

⁷⁹ Questionnaire of Jimmy, 1998.

⁸⁰ Questionnaire of Rhea 1999.

⁸¹ Questionnaire of Ellen, 1998.

⁸² Questionnaire of Susie, 1998.

⁸³ Questionnaires of Mark, Dora, John and Pam.

regarding keeping the memory alive within the family. One relative stated, “all family heritage and stories are important.”⁸⁴ This indicates that certainly among those sampled one of the most important and instinctive ways of ensuring a memory or image of the volunteers is continued, is through their family yet very few saw it as their place to carry on the memory of the war themselves.

The Archival Heritage

A textual analysis of the published accounts of the civil war has already been undertaken in Chapter One highlighting how memoirs stylistically contributed to the myth-making process, with accounts of bravery, solidarity and sacrifice. They also emphasised the predominance of the veteran in not only written but also all other oral and documentary evidence of British Battalion expression of the civil war experience. Whilst the content of published and oral material is obviously dedicated to the people who volunteered, it is the circumstances and to a certain extent the bias of gatherers and keepers (the archival institutions) that is worth scrutinising here as it gives an indication of how marginalized family experiences have been and particularly with existing oral material how difficult it has been to piece together a subjective account of what happened to them during the civil war.

The unpublished written documentation and oral collections pertaining to the Spanish Civil War and the British Battalion are housed at various archives around the country. There has been no attempt to centralise these materials although the ‘official’ archive acknowledged by the International Brigade Association (IBA) is held at the Marx Memorial Library under the title the ‘International Brigade Collection.’ Geographic dispersal is largely a result of how and by whom the collections have been created or initiated. To illustrate the point, for example, Hywel Francis was responsible for collecting much of the Welsh volunteers’ material which forms a large section of the South Wales Coalfield Collection held at Swansea University and the South Wales Miners’ Library. Ruth and Edmund Frow’s vast collection of material on the labour movement warranted the creation of the Working-Class Movement Library in Salford where letters, written by volunteers

⁸⁴ Questionnaire Rhea, 1998.

from the Manchester area and sent to their families, have been donated. The most comprehensive oral archive has been gathered and administered by the Imperial War Museum.

The 'International Brigade Collection' held at Marx House has been afforded official status by the IBA because it was set up in 1975 by Nan Green, Secretary of the Association at the time. In a letter to members she explains the purpose of its creation.

Our aim is to build such an archive, which will remain in
Marx House as a permanent memorial to the men and
women who fought...⁸⁵

In October 1975, a month before Franco's death, the first material was handed over to the Library.⁸⁶ The original aim of the archive was two-fold, firstly to act as a tribute to the volunteers and can therefore be considered as one of the first major memorials to the Brigaders and secondly, as a 'genuine' resource for future work on the Brigade.⁸⁷ The word genuine is an interesting choice implying that other material most likely unofficial could, according to the IBA, be unreliable.

Although the majority of veterans and their relatives are enthusiastic to deposit their memorabilia when the time comes there is much material still held in personal collections. One veteran and his wife explained that their memorabilia would be left to the Imperial War Museum because of accessibility to the public and tighter security arrangements.⁸⁸

In a similar period stimulated by fortieth anniversary reunion of the International Brigade, the Imperial War Museum's Oral History Project on the Spanish Civil War was initiated and began interviewing veterans.⁸⁹ The majority of the thirty-four

⁸⁵ Letter from Nan Green to IBA members, dated 17 August 1974, Box A-6, D/38, MML.

⁸⁶ Letter dated 18 October 1975, Box A-6, D/39, MML.

⁸⁷ Since then material has been donated by mainly English veterans to build the archive into a comprehensive and varied collection of documents. It includes, letters from volunteers in Spain, IBA correspondence and reports of the Communist Party in Spain on repatriation and Dependents' Aid documentation.

⁸⁸ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

⁸⁹ The Spanish Civil War Collection, Imperial War Museum Sound Archive Catalogue, Trustees of Imperial War Museum, 1996, p.ii.

interviews recorded in 1976 took place at Stanford Hall, Loughborough to commemorate the fortieth anniversary. The collection has now expanded to over 150 interviews not only of International Brigade veterans but nurses, medical aid workers, members of the ILP contingent, Spanish civilians, nationalist volunteers and journalists. Included are eight interviews with family categorised within the above headings and not separately under 'relatives.' This is because their input was seen as useful only in terms of second hand experience, usually of the veterans or first hand if they were political or worked in aid Spain organisations.

The oral and documentary collection of Welsh volunteers held at the South Wales Miners' Library and Swansea University was built up by Hywel Francis as a result of the material collected during his doctoral thesis on the Welsh Brigaders. The sound collection of his interviews with veterans and a handful of family conducted during the late 1960's and early 1970's are housed at the Miners' Library and one of the largest collections of letters (over three hundred) is part of the same archive but kept at the University of Wales, Swansea. The majority of these have been donated by family through Hywel Francis. Others have been deposited independently by relatives and other interested parties. Islwyn Nicholas wrote to relatives requesting information on various volunteers, as he was interested in compiling short biographical sketches.⁹⁰ They collectively form part of the South Wales Coalfield Collection.

Of the other archives two exist in Manchester, one in Scotland. Ruth and Edmund Frow, a well-known and respected couple within the labour movement founded the Working-Class Movement Library (WCML) in Salford. As they cycled around the country in the thirties and forties they collected material on working-class life and politics. When their semi-detached house became over-run with pamphlets, books, posters and other memorabilia it was moved to a building in Salford, which became the Library. Among this varied collection are sixty-five letters written by volunteers saved by relatives and friends and donated to the Library. The letters are written by

⁹⁰ Islwyn Nicholas wrote to May Thomas requesting information on Tom Howell Jones, SC183d, letter dated 8 June 1944. Also information on Arthur Morris, SC185, dated 19 May 1944. He donated all items he received to the archive.

seven veterans and it is assumed they are the complete collection of correspondence written by these men.

The Spanish Civil War Collection at the National Labour History Museum (NMLH) in Manchester contains the individual documents of dignitaries such as Bob Edwards leader of the ILP contingent, Harry Pollitt's papers and the letters of Molly Murphy, a nurse in Spain. The papers of Thomas Murray, a Scottish Brigader and Labour Councillor, are held at the National Library of Scotland.

The main concern of individuals and organisations has been to accumulate material about the experiences of the veterans. The Imperial War Museum pursues various common themes with the volunteers interviewed, such as general personal and political experiences and opinions, combined with more intricate topics, such as training, kit, daily routines and discipline. Questions on the reactions of family are not standard and it is left to some veterans to offer this information voluntarily. The small numbers of relatives interviewed provide the Imperial War Museum with information about the Brigader generally where the veteran has died. Mary Freeman, wife of Tommy who died in 1967, (herself an interesting subject to them as she was a member of the Young Communists' League) was asked about political activity, how she met her husband, his loss of weight when he returned home and the impact of Spain on his life. However, Mary is never asked what affect this had on family life and individual family relationships. Also present at this interview was her friend Mrs Syd Booth whose husband had been recently interviewed and who was not politically active. She relates without being asked the narrative of her emotions when her husband left for Spain and his return home injured; the difficulties of coping without him, neighbours' reactions and those of her family. She wept as she recalled her feelings at saying goodbye to him. The tape is inexplicably switched off halfway through her unprompted testimony.⁹¹

In Wales, Hywel Francis' sound collection is also predominantly composed of veterans' testimonies. Francis acknowledges this omission by later writing,

I was always reluctant to visit widows or close female
relatives of volunteers who had been killed in action,

⁹¹ Interview with Mary Freeman, 842/2, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 1976.

often, I should say in my defence, being warned against such visits by well meaning Party comrades.⁹²

His interviews with relations are chosen to provide information on volunteers killed in Spain,⁹³ or who were prominent in politics or aid Spain organisations.⁹⁴ One exception is a short interview of six minutes with Rita Rees the daughter of volunteer Leo Price. She talks about how she felt at her father's return and how her mother coped without him.⁹⁵ However, the tape is turned off to make a cup of tea and the interview is not resumed. Only assumptions can be made as to why this occurred.

There are practical reasons, as mentioned above, to explain why volunteers wrote most of the letters in the archives. Family correspondence was more likely to be lost or discarded in Spain. As a consequence the majority of over three hundred letters held in the South Wales Coalfield Collection are written by veterans. The stories of the few letters written by family members that finished up in archives make fascinating reading. For example, the Bob Edwards papers held at the National Labour History Museum in Manchester contain a collection of letters written to him by his wife May. As Bob Edwards was the leader of the Independent Labour Party contingent, who saw negligible action at the front in Spain, he was able to keep his wife's letters, an extremely thick bundle, and bring them home. A letter written by the parents of Tom Picton, shot whilst a prisoner of war in Spain, was donated by the nephew of Charlotte Owen who had passed it on, together with letters written by her husband, another volunteer killed in Spain. Charlotte also wrote a letter of sympathy to the Pictons that they returned and she kept in her collection of memorabilia. Her nephew R. Sydenham donated these to the South Wales Coalfield Collection at Swansea University. Finally the most incredible story is that of how a moving collection of family letters to Jim Strangward, killed on the Ebro, reached home. Letters from his brother, sister and father were rescued from Jim's body and

⁹² H. Francis, *History Workshop Journal*, No. 32, 1991, p.72.

⁹³ Interview with Walter Picton best illustrates this. AUD/423, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC).

⁹⁴ Olive Wilson was politically active and was also the sister of a volunteer. AUD/442, SWCC.

⁹⁵ Interview Rita Rees, AUD/386, SWCC.

somehow returned to them via the USA by the singer Paul Robeson.⁹⁶ There are a handful of other individual letters written by relations but these stories illustrate why there are so few, dependent firstly on luck and then a willingness by both veterans and relatives to donate them. Some veterans may not have been aware of the importance of correspondence written by relatives as opposed to the ones they wrote themselves.

The most significant reason for the lack of unpublished material on the families held in archives has been the importance placed on reconstructing the experiences of volunteers, particularly by organisations such as the Imperial War Museum. Francis also attributes it to the reticence of historians to approach bereaved relatives. However, it is not merely squeamishness on the part of researchers but a general lack of interest in reconstructing the private repercussions of the war. Combined with the practicalities of family letters and the haphazard way a few of these have been deposited both oral and documentary evidence of relatives is quantitatively inferior to that on the volunteers.

Artistic Expression of the Memory of the Spanish Civil War and the British Battalion

As with all public expressions of remembering the International Brigade and the Spanish conflict, the theatrical, musical and performance related displays have become more noticeable and more frequent since the death of Franco. The most popular forms have been plays, dance, song and film, *Land & Freedom* being the only British film about the conflict since 1975. Of equal interest to these forms of public expression are their conception and the participants in such projects. Are they part of those political responses Andy Croft discusses in his introduction to *A Weapon in the Struggle* of the Communist Party's impact on British culture being out of proportion to their political impact and size?⁹⁷ In assessing the cultural memory of the Spanish Civil War and British Battalion we must look beyond the Communist Party, and to the wider labour movement. Is the artistic expression a product of the myths that surround both the conflict and the volunteers or does it contribute to these

⁹⁶ Jim's brother Ivor Strangward passed this story onto Hywel Francis. Information quoted in, *History Workshop Journal*, 1991, p.73.

⁹⁷ Croft, A. *A Weapon in the Struggle*, 1998, p.2.

legends? Can these two distinctions be separated or do they rely on, or feed off, one another?

The distinguishing feature of the plays, songs, and performance are that they remain out of the cultural mainstream, in common with the many artistic representations that came out of the Communist Party; *Land and Freedom*, despite mass circulation, widespread publicity and winner of the Best Film at the Cannes Film Festival was written and directed by two anti-establishment figures. Similarly, the success of 'If you tolerate this your children will be next,' in reaching number one in the official singles chart, written by popular and acclaimed band the Manic Street Preachers, is juxtaposed by the group's own anti-establishment stance. Incidentally, both the film and the song are not included in official remembrance of the war as represented by the International Brigade Association (IBA); *Land and Freedom* because it tells the alternative history of the suppression of the POUM and the importance of social revolution above winning the war. The song because it belongs very much to a younger generation, although it was particularly popular among older relatives in Wales proud that a Welsh band had chosen to write about the volunteers. The words are not clearly associated with the heroics of the British Battalion.⁹⁸ They alternate between the resolve and bitter retrospection of the volunteer and the Brigader as seen through contemporary eyes.

The future teaches you to be alone. The present to be
afraid and cold. So if I can shoot rabbits then I can
shoot fascists....
And on the streets tonight an old man plays
With newspaper cuttings of his glory days.⁹⁹

As such it concentrates on ambiguities between fighting and holding pacifist principles that are more readily identified with the ILP contingent.

Most artistic expression of the memory of the International Brigade and the Spanish war takes place at provincial locations including theatres, community centres and

⁹⁸ Missing band member Richey Edwards said that one of his heroes was Leon Trotsky, which may have had some influence on the politics of the other band members. 'Revolutionary Rock' paper and date unknown.

⁹⁹ Lines to 'If You Tolerate This Your Children Will Be Next,' Manic Street Preachers. 1998.

universities, often on an amateur or voluntary basis. Another significant factor is the amount of productions based on true-life events perhaps an indicator that they are a product of the myth that surrounds the Brigade. There is no need to fictionalise because there are already so many dramatically affective life stories and incidents. The play *No Other Way* was adapted from a biography of the same name about volunteer Jack Roberts. *From the Calton to Catalonia* a play written by the Maley brothers was based on the experiences of their father in Spain. *Paper Angels*, a dance performance, “about Welsh people’s involvement in the Spanish Civil War, those who left to fight and those who were left behind,”¹⁰⁰ included as a background the reading of Frank Owen’s letters to his wife from Spain. *A Greater Tomorrow* is based on the life of Jock Cunningham and other Scottish volunteers. There is also a fair mixture of fiction of which *Petra’s Story*¹⁰¹ and *Needles of Light*¹⁰² are two examples.

The most prominent example of a fictional piece written and performed about Spain is Loach’s *Land and Freedom*, which ran into difficulties with the IBA for its depiction of the Communist’s role in the Barcelona uprising with the suppression of the POUM. However, trying to tell a true story is not without its problems. Frank Graham in reviewing Hector Manning’s *A Greater Tomorrow* about Jock Cunningham criticises his interpretation of controversial events.

Hector Manning studies this episode in Jock’s life thoroughly but genuinely came to wrong conclusions. From this point the play took a wrong turn. Jock appears as a violent critic of the decision to keep him in England and blames those about him for any mistakes made at Brunete. Harry Pollitt is strongly and I think wrongly attacked. It is a pity the ending of the play takes this line. Otherwise it could have been a masterpiece.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Flyer for performance of *Paper Angels*.

¹⁰¹ *Petra’s Story*, a play about the life of a young peasant girl from Catalonia and her encounter with a Welsh miner, was devised by Penygraig Youth Theatre. It was performed in April 1999. Publicity flyer.

¹⁰² *A ‘story’ of the Spanish Civil War* by James Pettifer went on tour around the country in 1987. Box A-14/11, MML.

¹⁰³ International Brigade Association (IBA) Newsletter, June 1997, p.4.

Could this partly explain the disproportionately large number of family willing to produce and collaborate with performance material on the Brigade? As if it would be difficult for 'official' memory to be critical of relatives' attempts to reproduce their own family stories? An unconscious feeling of their own inscrutability? At this stage it is merely supposition as no IBA reviews of relatives written or collaborative work have been found.

However, much of the final material displayed to the public that has significantly involved relatives does not portray the alternative history of the volunteers. It is keen to accentuate the heroic and sacrificial elements of the Brigade's engagement. Thus the dance performance *Paper Angels* used the letters of Frank Owen – this was made more poignant by the audience's knowledge of his death and that they were read aloud by his brother. The Stroud Football Poets presented the eulogy written by Martin Green in a commemoration at the Conway Hall.¹⁰⁴ Even the Maley brothers' play *From the Calton to Catalonia* about their father and his comrades despite showing the financial and emotional hardship of a volunteer's wife is keen to balance this with the Brigader's sacrifice for his family.

Janet Cairns: What diz he think ah'm living oan?
Billy: Ah know whit ah'm daein is right, darlin You
 and the wee man are the reason ah'm here...
Janet: He couldnae look me in the eye that
 day he wiz leavin. His eyes were gawn every
 road but me...
Billy: Ah miss ye. Ah love ye.
Janet: Love disnae buy the messages or pay
 the rent.¹⁰⁵

One can imagine that those in the audience, fully aware of the myths surrounding the Brigaders and the international consequences that followed the war, would find it difficult to sympathise with the 'smaller, less important' sacrifices of the relatives.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Martin Green. (Date and pseudonym suppressed to retain anonymity).

¹⁰⁵ Extract from transcript of *From the Calton to Catalonia* held at MML.

Janet is 'redeemed' in the audience's eyes for her 'misunderstanding' of the situation when she goes collecting for the Spanish Republic in spite of her own poverty.

Nor generally are these productions overtly political in the way *Land and Freedom* is. What they represent are the views of the labour movement encompassing all left-wing sympathies from Communist to Labour Party. The people that initiate and produce these displays come from this broadly left perspective. Inspiration is not only politically motivated but also stimulated by civic and even national pride. The Stroud Football Poets played a big part in the commemorative tree planting to local volunteer Thomas Dunscombe. They performed songs and poems about Spain in their production *No Pasaran!* celebrating the southwest's contribution to the war.¹⁰⁶ Both the West Glamorgan Community Dance Project and the Outlaws Theatre Company were keen to highlight the origins of the volunteers and their hardships before Spain.

No Other Way. From the Coalfields to the Battlefields...
a vivid portrayal of life both in South Wales Coalfields
and the Battlefields of Spain.¹⁰⁷

These political loyalties stimulate artistic minded people to memorialise the volunteers and the war by performance. However, the myth and legend that surround these figures is also a powerful motivation. Quite often their work is a product of this mythologisation. Quoting again from the publicity material for *No Other Way*, it was billed as,

The True Life Story of Jack Russia. HONOUR MADE
HIM A MAN... COURAGE MADE HIM A HERO...
HISTORY MADE HIM A LEGEND...¹⁰⁸

This actually acknowledges that the play is not only a product of Brigade mythologisation but also contributes to it by affirming what is already known about

¹⁰⁶ 'Hero remembered' Local paper, title unknown, 20 November 1998.

¹⁰⁷ Flyer for *No Other Way*, production at Blackwood Miners' Institute, 1998.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*,

the volunteers and inspiring newcomers to the 'story.' Richard Felstead believed that his book had contributed to the myths of his relative because it spawned the play that renewed interest in the war and Jack Russia. Also as a result of the book, the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, asked him to make a contribution by writing a piece about the life of his volunteer relation. The renewed interest surrounding Jack Russia presented Richard Felstead with a dilemma. It took the rest of his family into the public domain because he had placed his grandfather's life into that arena. The private became public and this presented problems for certain close members of his family.

At present it is difficult to attribute a separate sub-culture to the artistic public expression of the volunteers and the Spanish conflict. What has been produced is too disparate in its origins. It is not essentially a political expression, although the artists will have some affinity or identification with left-wing politics. There is also a desire to remember and communicate this, often inspired by close contact with relatives or a sense of their community and history.

The Organised Heritage

In the last twenty years the International Brigade Association has had, for its size, a disproportionately important influence on the organised heritage of the British Battalion.¹⁰⁹ The continuing high profile of the group, in all matters connected to the publicising of the Brigade was as a result of the hard work and forceful personality of the late Secretary Bill Alexander. Due largely to his efforts a tiny organisation, ever decreasing and geographically spread, whose members are finding it increasingly difficult to meet up, has continued to be very prominent in memorialising and discussing their experiences. Consequently, the group has remained active in many aspects of public life including the promotion of commemorative events, publicity of the aims and role of the volunteers in the press, through lectures, demonstrations and even summer schools. However, this veteran-centred, highly disciplined approach to the official history of the British Battalion gathered much criticism for being

¹⁰⁹ The membership of the IBA has only ever numbered the surviving veterans.

undemocratic, subsequently leading to the formation of a Friends organisation initiated by relatives unable to join the IBA as associate members.¹¹⁰

The hegemonic control exercised by the veterans' association over remembrance, that has followed a strict orthodox Communist interpretation, can be traced back through the history, formation and aims of the IBA. In 1939 ex-volunteers decided to form an Association, the agreed aims of which, were,

To carry on in Britain the spirit and tradition of the International Brigade as front-line fighters for defence and advance of democracy against fascism, for the rapid development of common action and purpose among all anti-fascist people to spread the truth about the struggle of the people, Army and Government of Republican Spain and to win all necessary support for the Spanish Republic.¹¹¹

However, it does not state by whom or in what way this statement was produced. It was 'in it's own words' a response to deal specifically with the situation in Spain. An old IBA membership book belonging to a veteran has printed within its cover the statement, "...an organisation...[for the] defence of democracy and freedom and peace to continue to develop the comradeship and unity fought for in Spain. Membership is open only to those who served democracy in Spain..."¹¹² These two statements show the exclusivity and direct purpose of the Association. Its role and aims were easy to pursue and maintain whilst Franco's dictatorship remained in Spain and veterans were still reasonably young and active.

After Franco's victory their attention turned to the release of Brigade prisoners of all nationalities held in concentration camps, mainly in France, who were further endangered by the Hitler War.¹¹³ An IBA periodical was produced called *Volunteer*

¹¹⁰ This situation could alter but it is dependent on the choice of Secretary and how the Committee of the Association wishes its future to go. At the time of writing many Brigaders had expressed a desire to amalgamate with the Friends. A meeting was being arranged between the two groups for some time in October 2001.

¹¹¹ B. Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.248.

¹¹² Quoted from the inside cover of an IBA membership book belonging to Tony McLean.

¹¹³ This included Spanish refugees who had fled the regime.

for Liberty.¹¹⁴ In a 1944 edition under 'Campaign Notes,' written by Association Secretary, Nan Green, an area of concern was fund-raising for various activities including the Limbs Fund.¹¹⁵

After the Second World War and the defeat of Hitler and Mussolini, Bill Alexander wrote that the IBA, "could extend its efforts to help the Spanish Republicans in exile and step up demands for political and economic measures to defeat..." Franco.¹¹⁶ Observers were sent to political trials in Spain in order to publicise the abuse of human rights and show solidarity.

Lopez's lawyer in Madrid seems to think it is OK. He says the military invoked a kind of statute of limitations that exists in Spanish law (1870) that says crimes committed constitutes a precedent so that no other trials of this kind can now take place. But I still wouldn't put it past those B's to think up something else...¹¹⁷

Alexander was keen to make aware that despite the varied careers of volunteers in many progressive movements, they held a 'special concern' for the struggles of the Spanish people.¹¹⁸ In addition to raising awareness and fund-raising, under the Secretaryship of Nan Green, an archive of documents related to the Brigade was set up. Martin Green writes of the importance of this to his mother,

Her last political energies went into organising and building up a living museum and archive of the British Battalion...¹¹⁹

Nan herself saw it as "...a permanent memorial to the men and women who fought..." and would provide future generations with authentic material.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ *Volunteer for Liberty* changed its name to *Spain Today* in 1946.

¹¹⁵ *Volunteer for Liberty*, March 1944, p.13. The Limbs Fund was set up to collect donations for invalid International Brigaders and Spanish Republicans in North Africa who required artificial limbs as well as proper medical treatment.

¹¹⁶ Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.251.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Chris Brunel from Nan Green dated 2 March 1965, Box A-6, D/20, International Brigade Collection, MML.

¹¹⁸ Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.247.

¹¹⁹ Introduction of Nan Green's unpublished memoir, *A Chronicle of Small Beer*, written by Martin Green, p.4.

Whilst the creation of an International Brigade Collection at the Marx Library was a legacy from the IBA to future generations, the aims of the Association remained the same. This was certainly justifiable whilst Franco remained but once Spain was settled on the path to a stable democracy after 1981 it became more difficult to maintain and to a certain extent keep justifying the original goal. The written aims of the Association remained unchanged although what they had worked for had naturally been achieved. This did not prevent some veterans within the group from giving a contemporary interpretation of its role. Fred Thomas, who represented the IBA at the unveiling of a memorial at Burry Port, South Wales said,

We must remember that the aspect of fighting fascism has finished. But it is still out there. When I read of racial hatred that still exists in Britain, I feel sure that there is still a great deal to do. Through the association we try to make people aware that fascism in its various forms, is still very much a threat.¹²¹

Likewise, the memorial lectures held every February in Stoke invite prominent figures from progressive organisations to highlight contemporary fascist threats. Much of the IBA's official work now appears to be consolidating their position and leaving a controlled imprint of the International Brigade's contribution on the public consciousness. This involves encouraging and providing an official presence at commemorative events, such as the unveiling of memorials and the campaign to keep the South Bank memorial in Jubilee Gardens. In addition to campaigns, social aspects have been uppermost, giving in their later years, an opportunity for many veterans to meet for the first time and become friends at annual reunions.

When we have a reunion, I really only know the people at the reunion through getting to know them at the reunion. I was not in the British Battalion, I was there early so I'm an outsider in many ways.¹²²

¹²⁰ Letter written by Nan Green to all IBA members dated 19 August 1974, Box A-6, D/38, MML.

¹²¹ 'Plaque honour for hero Evan' Burry Port Star, 6 March 1998.

¹²² Dave Marshall speaking at the Spanish Civil War Summer School at Wedgwood Memorial College. Workshop entitled 'The Next Generation,' 30 July 1999, p.7.

The International Brigade Association has an important part in leaving a tangible legacy of the ideals behind their volunteering by way of the numerous memorials around the country. Campaigns for the Republic helped keep Spain under Franco in the public eye. It has also, in its later years, prevented the isolation of veterans by organising commemorative events and keeping them informed. However, the strongly defended orthodox Communist view of the Battalion's history, rejected other 'oppositional' interpretations. This has resulted in a very complex set of arguments being exchanged. The first contentious issue is about who are considered as, and remembered officially as, volunteers. The South Bank memorial was dedicated to the International Brigade, the over 2,100 men and women who left for Spain. This includes only members of the Brigade, whatever their political affiliation, also medical and administrative staff. It has excluded people who volunteered outside of the jurisdiction of the Fifteenth Battalion. Such high profile people as Laurie Lee and George Orwell who also volunteered, the latter ending up with the Independent Labour Party contingent, are excluded. Their omission from the Memorial and any association with the Brigade volunteers is to say the least 'political' and is partly linked to the animosity between the ILP and Communist Party of Great Britain during the civil war period illustrated by a Party official's letter to Harry Pollitt in May 1938.

If this sort of thing [a recruitment scandal] gets into the hands
of the ILP they will make the most that they possibly can of it.
And if possible the ILP here [in Spain] is even more bitter
against the CP than the general national tone of the ILP.¹²³

This in turn was exacerbated by the struggles between the POUM and the Communist Party in Spain. Inexplicably tied in is the IBA's notion of the 'ideal' volunteer that you had to be actively fighting fascism, not preoccupied with collectivising land or social revolution. Those pursuing this aim most effectively were numbered in the ranks of the International Brigade. Thus those outside of it, although they had volunteered to help the Spanish Republic, were seen to have done

¹²³ Letter to Harry Pollitt from F. Gustin, 21 May 1938, Box 39, A/37, MML.

very little. They have been marginalized from official remembrance of the Spanish Civil War in Britain, consigned to oppositional and alternative memory.¹²⁴

Over sixty years after the conflict the debates around the ILP's contribution remain heated. Attacks by the Socialist Workers' Party and defenders of the ILP group have been concentrated on the Communist Party and not the International Brigade.

If you are going along to a meeting like that
[IB commemoration] it is quite difficult to
intervene for the pure heroism of the people
involved.¹²⁵

The Commanders of the Battalions, most associated with the Communist Party, are accused of paranoia and obsession with Trotskyist infiltration. Rank and file Brigaders are excused from blame for their own suspicion and mistrust of the ILP and POUM because they were seen to be isolated and therefore susceptible to propaganda. "It was a very small movement about which they believed lies because they met very few Trotskyists."¹²⁶ Many on the revolutionary left believe the Brigaders were used politically to promote the idea of the Popular Front and rather more cynically as canon fodder to show the world that men were dying for internationalism and anti-fascism and this they believed was a waste of their courage. On the other hand although they believed Brigaders were used, Trotskyist sympathisers are quite adamant that the volunteers were not dupes because of their awareness of why they had gone to Spain. Central to their assessment of the situation is the contradiction of Stalinism that can also be levelled at their own analysis. They acknowledge the sincerity, the heroism and the self-sacrifice, with admiration for their militant anti-fascism but feel the Communist Party betrayed it. Ironically what they feel they should reclaim for their own is the militant anti-fascism and internationalism that organisations like the Friends are working to promote.

¹²⁴ This has even occurred in the 'official' keeping of archival material on the ILP. Documents pertaining to the ILP contingent are filed with documentation on the nationalists in the 'International Brigade Collection,' MML.

¹²⁵ Intervention at the 1998 Marxism Conference, London, July 1998. No further information is known about this conference as a third party recorded the debate.

¹²⁶ Intervention at the 1998 Marxism Conference, London, July 1998. This is a convenient device for those uncomfortable with denigrating the volunteers.

The second contentious issue was apolitical and arose out of conflicting priorities for the future of the IBA between some within the veterans' Association and a few relatives of Brigaders.

The Friends – future of the Brigade Association?

The decision among some relatives to set up the Friends of the International Brigade (FIB) alongside the IBA was prompted by their attempts to join the veterans' organisation as associate members.¹²⁷ The idea behind associate membership was that when all of the Brigaders had died it, "...would entitle people to carry on the aims and ideals of the IBA being basically an anti-fascist organisation."¹²⁸ Due to the geographical dispersal of the would-be founding members¹²⁹ little was done until they met up in November 1996 at the Homanaje in Spain. They were prompted on their return to get together in London and as a result the Friends or Amigos was born. On the advice of other family and sympathetic veterans they kept the IBA informed of their actions. In February 1997 Dora wrote,

We see this organisation as complementing the work of the IBA. It would enable the younger generation to keep alive the memories of the War and the men and women who went to Spain. One of the most moving aspects of the recent visit was the fact that so many young people were obviously very keen to ensure that the war was not forgotten.¹³⁰

The aims of the FIB are forward looking in terms of what they wish to achieve. The organisation can be seen as having a dual purpose. It is (in no order of priority), to keep an interest in the International Brigade in the civil war, "not as a solitary historical event in the past,"¹³¹ but as part of the common struggle against international fascism. Thus to remember the volunteers through the upkeep of memorials and other public activities using them as an exemplar in the contemporary

¹²⁷ Mark mooted the idea of joining at the 1990 South Bank gathering. The following year he handed an open letter to veterans questioning the democracy of the IBA.

¹²⁸ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

¹²⁹ The founding members were Mark, Dora, Delores and Hilary Wild and Gideon Long.

¹³⁰ Letter to Bill Alexander from Dora, February 1997, in the possession of Bernard McKenna.

¹³¹ Information and publicity sheet produced by the FIB in 1997.

fight, in effect a continuation of the volunteers' battle. The memorials are therefore used as a rallying point for future generations of anti-fascists, not merely as a reference point for the past. The 'bottom line' as one founding member said, is to fight the rise in fascism.¹³²

In all aspects of membership and meetings the organisation is run democratically. Membership is open to all, but especially to relations and descendants of the Brigaders. This would ensure the close and personal attachment to the IBA. There are now approximately two hundred members. With the idea being mooted to amalgamate the IBA and Friends groups, membership has increased considerably with receipt of about three or four applications per week. This may have a little to do with the prospect of being joined to the group that includes the veterans.

As well as relatives it includes *scholars and politicians and has been achieved by* advertising through the left-wing press and by word of mouth. Their quarterly Newsletter carries articles on commemorative events and future meetings as well as reviewing books of interest.

Friends organisations also exist in Luxembourg, Romania, Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Russia and France. An international network has recently been set up to co-ordinate their actions. General meetings are held biannually. In September 1999 a meeting was held in Germany where many of the Friends groups met up to try to unify their publicity work. This is an important aspect of what the British group hopes to achieve in the future.

The profile of a typical member of the FIB (who is related to a volunteer) is politically active or with an avid interest in the civil war and their relative's involvement. Of the thirty-seven relatives who returned questionnaires, nine were members of the FIB. Of these, eight had been or are politically active in various ways. Seven had lost their relative before joining. Of the activist eight the combination of these two factors stimulated their membership of the group. A third of those were committee members of the FIB. Most of the others found it difficult to attend meetings due to where they lived. Possible reasons for such low numbers from the sample could be the difficulties in reaching the vast number of family,

¹³² Dora speaking at the Spanish Civil War Summer School, Wedgwood Memorial College. Workshop entitled 'The Next Generation.'

particularly if they do not read the left-wing press (*Morning Star* or *Searchlight*) or if they do not mix with other relatives of Brigaders. At least three interviewees had not heard of the organisation but expressed an interest in joining.¹³³ Others were not interested for various reasons that included, lifestyle, location, or enthusiasm for the war. One can sense there are mixed feelings towards the FIB from relatives. They are saddened that there has been a need to form it but are enthusiastic about what can be achieved.

The eagerness with which founding members pursued, firstly associate membership of the IBA and then setting up the Friends illustrates the commitment to keep alive the memory and beliefs of their relatives. The FIB is another way in which the family members express their own agreement with the political aims of their parents or grandparents and their concerns that the memory and the message of the Brigades remains clear and relevant. It in no way intends to deviate from the heroic construct of the veterans' achievements. Therefore although its aims are set in the future, with the continued fight against international fascism, they are an embodiment of the past. The meeting of the two groups on common ground such as memorial gatherings has until recently been merely symbolic. By the very existence of two separate groups their differences are apparent. One looks to the future, taking as its example the past, the other is measuring out time.¹³⁴ Yet the loss of the IBA Secretary and the dwindling number of remaining veterans suggests the two will join very soon.

¹³³ Few respondents were asked because it was thought to be promoting the organisation, which would have been unethical.

¹³⁴ It should be noted that several veterans spoken to had supported relatives becoming associate members of the IBA and welcomed the Friends organisation. These include Bernard McKenna, Lance Rogers and Fred Thomas. This was also written before the possible idea to amalgamate the two groups was mooted.

Conclusions

Since Franco's death there has been an unstoppable momentum in the desire of a select few to publicly remember the exploits of the British Battalion. The founding of the Brigade archive, the 40th anniversary reunion of veterans in the late 1970's and the wish to include their experiences into the burgeoning oral history movement started an interest that is yet to die down within the labour movement and among historians. At left-wing conferences there is always at least one debate surrounding their engagement. However, the memory of the Spanish Civil War and International Brigade in Britain has been a contentious, partisan and exclusive one dominated by a small number of influential people in the veterans' organisation. The controversial events of the civil war continue to be debated by the different factions on the left. The exclusivity of the memory is as dismissive of other volunteers, such as members of the ILP, as they are of nationalist experiences.

Once Spain was democratic the role played by the Brigade was strongly defended by more orthodox International Brigade Association members. However, they have only been partly responsible for their own mythical status. The left in Britain has claimed the actions of the volunteers for part of the heroic traditions of the labour movement. Whilst its historians have heralded World War Two in Britain as the 'People's War', the political overtones of the civil war and its limited impact on the lives of apolitical British citizens, became clearly the domain of working-class history and culture. The besieged situation of the labour movement during the 1980's under Thatcher was the period that saw the most physical reminders of the civil war's impact in Britain, by way of memorial stones. Well over half were erected between 1979-1990.

The only group who did not capitalise on the changed situation in both Spain and at home were the families. They were always peripheral to commemorations and ignored by organisations singing the praises of the veterans. It has only been in very recent years that relatives have begun to assert themselves by their existence with the formation of the Friends of the International Brigade, although this was necessitated by their exclusion from the veterans' association. Therefore relatives have yet to shape how the civil war will be remembered in Britain in future years but it will not be long before they do.

Perhaps the single most important factor in Brigade remembrance has been the defence of the image of the volunteers, a vision constructed and managed for so long by the Communist Party. They were to have a profound impact, disproportionate to their size and influence over British political life, on the families of International Brigaders.

CHAPTER THREE

THE POLITICAL HERITAGE

The unique legacy left by the Spanish Civil War on those who fought and their families was brought about by the circumstances in which men made the decision to fight and ultimately what they were fighting for. It is characterised strongly by its close association with the politics of the conflict. Neither the Great War nor World War Two, whose repercussions were so much greater on the British national psyche, could claim such a partisan effect in its remembrance. This chapter charts the evolutionary process of the political heritage and how it became a major part of life for many of the Brigaders' relatives, both during the war and after, as families grew in numbers and years.

Central to the organisation and the inspiration of the labour movement was the Communist Party of Great Britain who played down their recruitment role in light of the state's non-intervention policy. The Party were behind much of the activity surrounding the British volunteers and therefore came into close contact with their families. Whilst volunteers were away in Spain the labour movement organised and administered financial assistance to dependant relatives. Initially this was the idea of the Communist Party who had close association with its operations. Emotional support for the anxious and the bereaved was also available although it was not always a success.

Attitudes towards family members within the political context illustrate that the volunteers were the Party's number one priority. Equally problematic was the very public nature of political life and communist ideologies juxtaposed by having to deal with private emotions such as grief. Thus the relatives became marginal to the martyred individual and their cause.

After the war many existing and emerging families found that politics often linked strongly to the Spanish Civil War, became an important part of their lives whether they wanted this or not. For some the legacy of the war and its ideology was an essential aspect of oral tradition and family learning. The political education of children and partners by veterans was one of the many unique characteristics of the war's heritage in Britain and this was primarily the result of the Communist Party's influence.

The Communist Dominance

The heyday of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was undoubtedly the second half of the 1930's when it briefly combined forces with other left-wing organisations in a popular front against the rising tide of international fascism. This epoch was dominated by the civil war in Spain. Kevin Morgan describes the Party at this time as, "the most dynamic force on the British left."¹ If the Popular Front heralded by the Seventh World Congress galvanised the CPGB into the possibility of more effective action against the extreme right, it was the Spanish Civil War that saw them take the initiative by organising a direct response to the crises of the Republican Government.

In the months before the military uprising in Spain Harry Pollitt, Secretary of the CPGB, voiced what he saw as a perceptible shift in the concerns of British workers. Whilst domestic battles, against the Means Test and unemployment were still considered important the threat of European war and the spread of Fascism was beginning to dominate their consciousness.² Thus when it was decided to form a British Battalion in December 1936³ the CPGB devoted all of its energies to inspiring, recruiting and overseeing the majority of volunteers who went to the Spanish Republic's aid. It was little wonder that Morgan described this as the Communist Party's "heroic period,"⁴ terminology implicitly linked to the Party's official imagery of the Brigaders. Thus in 1930's Britain the Communist Party became synonymous with the International Brigade and vice versa and not only because the majority of volunteers were members. The Party initiated and organised many of the aid programmes to Spanish republicans and dependants of Brigaders in Britain. Consequently it became the first port of call for anxious relatives. It was also their language and political traditions that were used to memorialise those volunteers killed in Spain. The Communist Party continues in spite of its world decline to exert an influence over both the way the war and Battalion are remembered and in the political beliefs of some volunteers and their descendants.

¹ K. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993, p.89.

² *ibid.*, p.95

³ H. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 1984, p.156.

⁴ K. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 1993, p.89.

The Profile of a Communist Party Member

There are many references to the characteristics and likely temperament of an active member of the Communist Party. The requirements of particular personality traits stems from the fanaticism, dedication and strict discipline needed by both leadership and rank and file for the Party's ideological survival. Whilst Hywel Francis believes it to be unfair and inadequate to describe Communism as a faith⁵ a number of the relatives interviewed felt that their parent's devotion to the Party and the Communist creed had strong religious overtones. Nigel wrote,

I think my Dad's commitment also influenced me in a religious sense, as I now see a parallel between my teenage conversion to a fundamentalist strain of evangelical Christianity and my Dad's conversion to Communism, which for him was virtually a religion.⁶

Mark also saw the religiosity in his mother's beliefs in and conversion to Communism.

She was a highly moral person, the transference of her inherited faith in God becoming one in the possibility of mankind improving its lot by its own efforts; not so much a belief that heaven on earth was possible but one that posited a belief there was no point in waiting for it to happen unaided.⁷

For many members, particularly during the Thirties, the Party represented devotion to a cause, this being simply the creation of a just and equal society. For the working-class communists living in socially and economically disadvantaged communities this had a real resonance with their own lives and struggles. So men and women devoted most of their energies, their active lives in essence, to securing the Communist ideal. Spain came to represent the living embodiment of these principles. For Mrs Jessie Lacey the attributes of her wounded son and others like him, "[h]is

⁵ H. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 1984, p.188.

⁶ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

⁷ Mark, unpublished introduction to his mother's memoir, p. 6.

eagerness to get back to the front lines again shows that though fascist bullets may maim their bodies their spirit remains unbroken” and it was this dedication in the face of real danger that made him a “true Communist,”⁸ as opposed to a true soldier. It also makes his mother a “true Communist” as she appears quite prepared to sacrifice her son for the cause of Spanish democracy. The dogged determination to see the fight through at any cost pervades many of the volunteers’ letters home to friends and family.

If at some future date I once again go to the front to fight
for freedom (perhaps very soon at home) my one desire is
to do the job, if necessary to the end...⁹

They very much illustrate the “dyed in the coal”¹⁰ attitude of many of the volunteers accentuated still further by service in Spain.

Of course not all Communist Party members fitted in exactly with this norm if indeed there was one. Lance Rogers was a member of the Independent Labour Party before he left for Spain but joined the Communist Party whilst there. He described himself as “CP by association not temperament,”¹¹ denoting that there were certain characteristics associated with being a Communist that were not obviously the conservative stereotypical traits outsiders believed they possessed.

We are in the barber’s shop waiting for a shave. We’ve got
three weeks’ growth on and we resemble what some people
think Bolshevik’s look like.¹²

⁸ Mrs Jessie Lacey to Harry Pollitt, 1 April 1937, HP/IND/POLL/2/6, National Museum of Labour History (NMLH), Manchester.

⁹ Letter from Jud Colman to Norah and Issy, dated 3 October 1937, Box 12, F67, Working-Class Movement Library (WCML), Salford.

¹⁰ This is a phrase veteran Lance Rogers used to describe a dedicated Communist comrade, Harry Dobson, letter to NS, dated 3 November 1999.

¹¹ Interview with Lance Rogers, AUD/248, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC), Swansea.

¹² ‘Letters they wrote home...,’ Letter written by Will Lloyd and published in an unknown newspaper in mid January 1937

Stereotypes were rife throughout the Cold War period. As a teenager, in the 1950's, Joe read a lot of American literature. "I met Communists and they were nothing like the way they were described. I mean it was all baloney, worse than that."¹³

Fred Thomas felt he was too individualistic to be regarded as the perfect CP'er.¹⁴ His self-assessment was pretty accurate, his file in the Moscow archive records him as, "cynical" and "openly critical of the CP membership in Spain," suggesting an independent mind.¹⁵ A collective spirit kept in check by a centralised Party hierarchy was the desired aim.

Nor did possessing these traits to any degree guarantee an unerring, unquestioning dedication to the cause. Rob Stradling after studying the diary of young Cardiff volunteer Syd Hamm stated,

Undoubtedly SH's strength of purpose was undermined by the fact that...his health began to suffer...Yet this was no malingerer adventurer,...or political subversive...[he] volunteered for Spain out of an overwhelming sense of commitment.¹⁶

So it is too simplistic to state that to have strength of purpose, devotion, and self-discipline meant the task in Spain was not without problems, nor that if you did not possess all of these traits you were not best fitted for the job. In fact even the traditional profile of a Communist Party member was imbued with ambiguity and far from clear-cut.

In Kevin Morgan's biography of Harry Pollitt he comments on the ambiguity in Pollitt's own political dealings, "...an integrity worth going to the stake for alongside a readiness to manipulate,"¹⁷ and it is the dichotomy of these two contrasting traits that Morgan feels must be grasped before an understanding of both Pollitt and the Communist Party can be reached. This ambiguity not only in the political but personal characteristics of CP'ers was observed by many of their children. The strict, disciplinarian prudish tenets in the Calvinist ethic were sometimes likened to those in

¹³ Interview with Joe, November 1999.

¹⁴ Informal interview with Fred Thomas, November 1998.

¹⁵ Quoted in K. L. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 1998, p.265.

¹⁶ R. Stradling, (ed) *Brother Against Brother*, 1998, p.15

¹⁷ K. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 1993, p.94.

the Communist tradition.¹⁸ Dora spoke of how when her marriage broke up her father blamed her,

This was typical of the sort of Calvinist way of life that you find in CP members of that era.¹⁹

Communist party members felt that they had to be above criticism and so many tried to lead exemplary private lives where they might be beyond reproach. This harkens back to the rigid centralised orthodox party line advocated by Stalin. In Spain, for example, drunkenness and homosexuality were severely punished.

In contrast there were the Party members far more liberal in the way they lived their lives. Michael Rosen described how his parents were affected by the "...Bloomsbury end of bohemian life..."²⁰ which to more orthodox members was regarded as an anathema. Mick saw his father's personality as similarly "...unconventional and slightly bohemian."²¹ However he was unsure whether the free loving and free-thinking (his father had strong sympathies with anarchist theories) was a product of his nature or his Communist way of life. Certainly it did not help him in his political career, "...me Dad never got on in the union and the Communist Party, he could have become a full-time official and CP organiser but he was regarded as too much of a maverick, he drank, he had a sense of humour and he was irreverent...the ones who got on were the whiter than whites." Although during the war in Spain it did not prevent him becoming a Commander of the Battalion, certainly the influence of the Cold War (c.1947 onwards) made orthodox members more politically appealing.

These dominant and ambiguous images have much in common with the official International Brigade Association (IBA) history of the Battalion, particularly that of the Spanish Civil War period. A man with unorthodox traits like Mick's dad could be seen as a hero in Spain but at home be unable to penetrate Party bigotry, despite the respect he mustered among rank and file members. Attributes of dedication, unswerving loyalty to the cause, discipline and the single-minded determination to

¹⁸ Nina Temple one of Phil Cohen's interviewees talks of this in *Children of the Revolution*, 1998, p.93-94.

¹⁹ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998. The era she talks of is the Cold War.

²⁰ P. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, 1998, p.63.

²¹ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

defeat fascism were often enough to see a volunteer through to a distinguished career in Spain. Combine these traits with a willingness to subordinate individual thought to the Party leadership and a moral, temperate life-style produced an ideal Communist in Spain. These latter attributes had to be present if a member wished to advance far in the Party during the Cold War period.

PARTY OBLIGATION AND FAMILIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The attitude of the Communist Party towards the relatives of volunteers and their role within the Spanish context reveals much about where they believed their priorities lay. In Britain Harry Pollitt took the main responsibility for answering the queries and complaints of hundreds of worried relations. Heads of local branches of the Party and some Brigaders returned from Spain assisted him in this mammoth task. In Spain Political Commissars dealt with the anxieties of volunteers for their family members back home. In most of the surviving correspondence and reports left by Communist Party officials their associations with family were burdensome to them. Many within the Party believed that relations had a certain role to fulfil in supporting their 'men folk' in Spain. There is a real sense amongst much of the surviving documentation of the Communist Party that any other interactions were an annoying distraction from their central task of defeating the Nationalists.

However, Pollitt dominated the dealings between family and Party during the time the British Battalion was in Spain in a very different way to those under him. Beckett writes of Pollitt's morale boosting trips to Spain where, "when he finished speaking, he got out his notebook and took down the messages they had for home. He never failed to deliver them."²² He showed an equal determination to administer to the needs of dependant relatives back in Britain.

²² F. Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, John Murray, London, 1995, p.53.

The Dependants' & Wounded Aid Association²³

The Dependants' & Wounded Aid Association had begun its existence as the Harry Pollitt Aid Spain Fund. The Dependants' Aid Committee (DAC), to give it its abbreviated title, was administered and financed by the labour movement. It was a response to the increasing number of families affected by their relatives' decision to volunteer for Spain and also to the increasing number of wounded men returning to Britain after major engagements. A 'Souvenir to [the] British Battalion of the International Brigade' stated that the Committee was "founded under [the] patronage of leading representatives of all sections of democratic" organisations.²⁴ However, Charlotte Haldane says it lay with the Communist Party's decision to organise a Dependants' Aid Committee.²⁵ The Harry Pollitt Fund balance of £3,468²⁶ was transferred to the newly named Dependants' and Wounded Aid Committee, which incorporated a wider representation of patrons from the general labour movement, these included Labour M.P.'s Emmanuel Shinwell, Ellen Wilkinson, the maverick Conservative MP Duchess of Atholl and the writer J. B. Priestley. The Honorary Secretary was Communist Charlotte Haldane. Its origins and subsequent control have much to do with the reasons why the Fund was so often accused of being an organ of the Communist Party. Fred Copeman, ex-British Battalion commander and future Secretary of the Committee, alludes to decisions by the Party to change the Secretary and also to the Association's finances being, "tied by the Party's means of collecting money."²⁷ Yet when explaining the intentions of the Committee Haldane was always at pains to emphasise its political neutrality. She explained in a letter that they were, "a non-party organisation made up of a number of people strongly sympathetic to the Republican cause and that responsibility for dependants was not left entirely to the

²³ Also referred to as the Dependants' and Wounded Aid Committee or simply Dependants' Aid Committee.

²⁴ 'Souvenir to British Battalion of the International Brigade,' not dated, Box B-8 H/2, Marx Memorial Library (MML), London.

²⁵ Haldane, *Truth Will Out*, 1949, p.98. Haldane's statement in her 'cold war' memoir is blatantly political considering the attempts at disassociation from Communist Party control employed by the Committee, including Haldane as its Secretary, throughout its duration.

²⁶ *And After* pamphlet published by DAC, 1939, shows accounts for June 1937 to end of 1938. Box 39 B/11, MML.

²⁷ Copeman, *Reason in Revolt*, 1948, p.153. Copeman's was another 'cold war' memoir.

good will of the Communist Party,”²⁸ which was technically the truth. However, it remained difficult for them to completely disassociate themselves from links with the Communist Party due to the overwhelming majority of volunteers who were members.

The Fund was initially set up to give material assistance to wives, children and other relatives dependant financially on the volunteers. It later took on responsibility for returning wounded who would have found it doubly difficult to keep families and find work. It was a very ambitious scheme considering it, “only visualised being able to prevent undue hardship to wives and children.”²⁹ At its height the Fund was paying out £700 per week in grants and assistance.³⁰

How then did the Committee finance the huge commitment they had undertaken? Income was gathered from a variety of sources within the labour movement. Two thousand trade union organisations donated the most over the eighteen-month duration of the Committee (June 1937 – end 1938).³¹ From July/August 1938 ex-Battalion Commander Fred Copeman took over the Secretaryship from Charlotte Haldane. It was thought, somewhat chauvinistically, by the Communist Party that he would have more success in raising funds, particularly from the trade unions. Not surprisingly the Miners’ Federation collected the most money over the lifetime of the Fund. Mining was the second most popular profession of the volunteers³² and their members and communities were among the most generous in terms of collecting aid for the Spanish Republic.³³ Donations also came from the Co-operative Movement, Labour Party branches and Communist organisations. Selling specially printed pamphlets became the popular method of raising money combining propaganda with fund-raising. One example was the song sheet ‘We Shall Pass’ selling at 3d a copy.

²⁸ Charlotte Haldane to Standing Joint Committee for Industrial Women Organisation, 30 May 1939, Box 39 A/7, MML.

²⁹ Charlotte Haldane to Standing Joint Committee for Industrial Women Organisation, 30 May 1939, Box 39, A/7, MML.

³⁰ ‘Receipts and Payments Account’ for the 6 month period, stated that £600 per week covered demands but this was increased to £700 per week due to an influx of wounded men returning from the Ebro battles between July and September 1938. Box 39 B/2, not dated but late 1938.

³¹ £15,342 was the final total raised by trade unions. Box B-8 H/4, MML.

³² Based on statistics from Richard Baxall’s Social and Political Study of the Fifteenth Battalion, thesis as yet unpublished. London School of Economics.

³³ At the Miners’ Executive Committee of the 1938 Trade Union Congress it was decided to donate £200 per week to the DAC from branch subscriptions. Trade Union Congress Report, 1938, p.368.

Another found among the papers of Lance Rogers was entitled 'Pollitt Visits Spain' for 2d a copy. In addition they carried advertisements and appeals for trade union contributions. All of the well-known strategies for raising donations were used; Christmas and New Year Appeals,³⁴ The Grand Variety Concert in Aid of Wounded and Dependants of the International Brigade,³⁵ and an open letter sent to individuals.³⁶

My Committee is already indebted to you for the considerable support...etc.³⁷

Appeals continued well into 1939 for the National Memorial Fund. The Young Communists' League newspaper *Challenge* made an emotional appeal by highlighting the sacrifices made by the volunteers. It featured the stories of four men, three wounded in Spain giving the extent of their injuries. The fourth, killed in action, centred on his widow unable to cope financially with feeding and clothing their young child. Responsibility is placed very much with those for whom the volunteers were fighting and their emotive plea reads,

And since it was in your cause that those boys went out it is your job to care for the wounded, keep the widows from want and find money and jobs for the demobilised soldiers. How much is Walter Crispin's sacrifice worth to you?³⁸

The absence of state aid usually given to war widows and wounded veterans made these emotional appeals all the more necessary. They were a continual reminder to sympathetic members of the public that the labour movement had only their own resourcefulness to fall back on in providing for those who fought their battles both directly and indirectly.

³⁴ Box 39 B/1a, MML.

³⁵ Notice how the emphasis had changed to the wounded over the dependants. Box 39 B/1a, MML.

³⁶ Dated 25 May 1938, Box 39 B/5, MML.

³⁷ *ibid.*,

³⁸ 'The Men Irene Pool Write About Here Are Our HEROES! – What will you do for them now?' *Challenge*, 10 June 1939, Vol. 5, No. 23.

There is sparse documentary evidence to illustrate the exact number of families helped, although limited records remain regarding final settlements made by the National Memorial Fund to wounded ex-Brigaders. (See **Appendix Six**) Correspondence between the DAC and recipients and Communist Party reports from Spain only highlight discrepancies in payments and those who were overlooked.



The above photograph shows veterans and widows at the 1938 Trade Union Congress. In the forefront of the picture are wounded Brigaders, all amputees, - the most visual injury. Very much in the background are the widows of volunteers but again very visually dressed in mourning apparel. (Imperial War Museum)³⁹

³⁹ 'Delegation of wounded men from the British Battalion, and widows of men killed, received by the Trades Union General Council in London. Left to Right: Holland, White, Watson, King and Adams.' Spanish Civil War Photograph Collection, HU 34763, Imperial War Museum (IWM), London.

However, the DAC extended its help not only to widowed dependants with a family but also to mothers with young children unable to work whilst their husbands were in Spain. Funeral expenses were sometimes met and elderly dependant parents were given aid. The average weekly figure paid to a family of any size was 30s per week. *And After*, the pamphlet produced by the Committee, listed many schemes that had materially or spiritually benefited recipients such as entertainment and outings. In the summers of 1937 and 1938 children over seven years of age from London, Manchester and other large cities were taken on holiday. In London the younger children were taken to the zoo accompanied by their mothers. Relatives from Glasgow and the west of Scotland were taken on a steamer trip to a seaside resort on the Clyde. Finally, Christmas parties were arranged in 1937 and 1938 with a present for every child.⁴⁰ 'And After' was eager to present, as with all propaganda of this kind, a rosy picture of their achievements. It was important that all publicity material highlighted the sacrifice of the volunteers. Although the Dependants' Aid Fund did ease the financial situation of many families there were numerous difficulties. DAC's commitment to the medical assistance of wounded Brigaders took priority over dependant families. Once home wounded men received higher allowances than a wife or widow with children. (See **Appendix Six**) Particular pressure was put on the Committee from the repatriation of incapacitated men who had fought in the Ebro campaign. Consequently relatives received a letter in August 1938 stating their allowance had to be reduced because of increasing debt and a loan of £200 that needed repaying to the bank.⁴¹ A further letter illustrated to the relatives where the Committee's priorities lay.

The resources of our Committee have been taxed to the utmost.
The growing number of returned wounded have to be cared
for and to meet this vital need we have been reluctantly
compelled to cut down the maintenance grant to the wives
of men in Spain by 5/- per week.⁴²

⁴⁰ *And After*, 1939, p.2.

⁴¹ Letter from Secretary of DAC to all on benefits, 8 August 1938, SC294, SWCC.

⁴² Letter from DAC to all on benefit, not dated, Box B-8 H/10, MML.

Similarly in Spain the domestic financial considerations of many of the volunteers was very low on their superiors' list of priorities. Records show that much time was spent by Political Commissars listening to men's concerns about the financial well being of their loved ones and then typing and sending these complaints and queries to the Communist Party Headquarters in Britain. A note of exasperation sometimes crept into these communiqués.

Cde J. Kelly's wife who is to have a child in about 6 weeks...

This is the fourth time we have asked. For goodness sake
please wire us by return the position.⁴³

The fact that Political Commissars dealt on a daily basis with queries regarding dependants and Harry Pollitt's conscientious involvement (not directly with the DAC) but in handling most of the queries from relatives regarding the whereabouts of volunteers, led to the Committee always being associated with the Communist Party. This link with all aspects of domestic queries meant the Party was first in line to take the blame when allowances were stopped or entitlement was refused. In these situations the Committee was always careful to defend the Communist Party without accentuating their links with them. When Mrs Langmead was causing trouble for the Party, some years after the end of the civil war, Harry Pollitt wrote to a comrade.

The best reply we can make...is that it was not the Party which
was responsible for the welfare of the wives...but the DAC and
that if she had made application there is no doubt that her case
would have received every consideration. That is what I have
advised the District anyway.⁴⁴

The tone of this letter suggests that the reputation of the Party was uppermost as well as that of the Committee's neutrality. There is also no evidence to imply that the Communist Party favoured the relatives of Party members. Owen, whose father was the only man to volunteer from his area states that numerous promises were made by

⁴³ Bill Rowe to Secretary (CPGB), 28 July 1937, Box 39 A/26, MML.

⁴⁴ Secretary (CPGB) to Comrade Bennett, 1 July 1946, Box 39 A/4, MML.

the DAC to provide financial assistance to his widowed mother. He remembers a visit by Fred Copeman, the new Secretary of the Committee, "...he was a big fella...sandals on and he sat on the settee, he must have been six foot, six foot two. He was huge,"⁴⁵ who said he would help if he could but nothing came of that and other visits from Party members. Owen says that his mother, an active Party member, survived on Parish Assistance and help from her father who was a collier. He maintains that if it had not been for his grandfather the family would have been split up. Why Owen's mother was not assisted remains difficult to ascertain. However, where possible the Committee left families on Parish Assistance who was already receiving it to save the organisation money, although Parish Relief was considerably lower than Committee allowances.

The reasons for the exclusion of the Masky family from aid are more obvious. Bert Masky, killed at Jarama, was of Russian descent and a Communist Party member. His wife did not receive any Dependants' Aid because Masky had not informed the Committee he had a wife and two children when he volunteered. In fact, they had been separated some years before he left for Spain. Mrs Masky involved individuals and voluntary organisations in her case to petition the Committee. However, they remained steadfast that Mrs Masky, "had no real basis for a claim."⁴⁶ Thus she was left on Parish Assistance. Financial restrictions meant the Committee had to observe strict guidelines as to exactly who was eligible for aid and partners who were separated were not eligible.

The Committee also acted ruthlessly to protect its precious resources. In April 1938, Mrs B. Fenelly wrote to Haldane to report that she had not received her weekly allowance.⁴⁷ As a result she had been impelled to apply for out-door relief to the Parish Assistance Committee who twice wrote to the DAC enquiring why her money had been withdrawn.⁴⁸ Haldane's reply to the Parish was prompt informing them that no further allowance would be paid as Mrs Fenelly's husband was no longer in Spain. It was a further six days before Haldane hurriedly wrote, "sorry for delay in

⁴⁵ Interview with Owen, 18 August 1999.

⁴⁶ Letter to Standing Joint Committee for Industrial Women's Organisations, 9 March 1937, Box 39 A/5, MML.

⁴⁷ Box 39 A/25, MML.

⁴⁸ On the 16th and 20th of April 1937, Box 39 A/25, MML.

replying to letter – allowances stopped while checking information.” they finally confirmed to Mrs Fenelly that her husband had, “returned without permission,” and was in Bristol. Basically her husband was a deserter and they asked Mrs Fenelly, who had just found out that her husband had also deserted her, to “appreciate [their] difficult position.”⁴⁹ Mrs Fenelly’s case revealed some interesting behaviour; firstly, irrespective of the hardship caused the DAC suspended her allowance with no warning whilst they were investigating her husband. This action caused her considerable consternation and embarrassment. Secondly they asked her to appreciate their difficult situation, with very little regard for her own difficult situation. Quite simply they could not be seen to be paying for the family of a deserter even though his actions were hardly the fault of his wife.⁵⁰ The tragic case of Mrs Fenelly is one of many instances where considerations of image and the protection of funds were put before the family.

When Fred Copeman took over the Secretaryship later in 1938 he succeeded in replacing existing Committee staff with Brigade members and their dependants. It was certainly ex-Brigaders who administered grants from the National Memorial Fund. Copeman mentions the mass memorial meeting at Earl’s Court, where a staggering £460 was collected, starting the Dependants’ Aid Memorial Fund.⁵¹ However, records only exist to show the Fund was primarily administered to assist wounded ex-volunteers with maintenance grants or setting up their own businesses. The records that remain of fifty-one Brigaders (**Appendix Six**) show that amputees and men with severe wounds that rendered their limbs useless did not always receive the most income per week. Another interesting feature of the records is how it illustrates the physical impact of the war. Fourteen of the fifty-one volunteers listed were amputees, the majority of the rest had incapacitating wounds which would have made it exceptionally difficult for them to find work, hence the generous weekly income. *And After* stated that the Memorial Fund attempted to place men back into work but that their options were “woefully limited” as few employers were

⁴⁹ Letter 26 April 1938, Box 39 A/25, MML.

⁵⁰ Joseph Fenelly (one of many names he went under) had deserted from Spain and succeeded in embezzling money out of CP branches in Bristol and Sussex for his mythical fare back to Spain. Most unsavoury of all was the way he severed himself from his wife and responsibilities by writing to her claiming to be someone else, to the effect that he had been killed in Spain.

⁵¹ Copeman, *Reason in Revolt*, 1948, p.176.

sympathetic to ex-Brigaders.⁵² Individual grants settled on wounded men tended therefore to help them to set up their own businesses. One volunteer was given the passage to Australia to join a relative. Amputees like George Blissett, who had lost an arm, were given generous maintenance grants of at least £80. However, it was difficult to ascertain how the Committee for the fund reached decisions about the amounts to be awarded. Much of the information is missing but it appeared to rest with a number of factors, which of course included the type of injury sustained, living circumstances but most importantly the cost of the business they wished to set up. Can this explain why Patrick Duff's suggested grant was between £120-150? His injury was less severe than George Blissett's but he wished to start a general stores business.

The Memorial Fund would have been a lifeline to men physically affected by the civil war. None of them were entitled to disability allowances or pensions paid by the State to war veterans. The grants made life easier for the ex-Brigaders who without them would have been left on out-door relief. The Memorial Fund can be seen as an acknowledgement by the labour movement of the sacrifices made by the Brigaders in their service.

Documentary evidence on the Dependants' and Wounded Aid does present two sides to the relative success of the organisation. On the one hand publicity material paints a glowing picture of the work it did on behalf of families and wounded men. **Appendix Six** illustrates the fifty-one men, eight married with dependants, who benefited from weekly allowances. Yet Communist Party records and correspondence at the Committee from individuals and various organisations show numerous families went without assistance. Charges were also made regarding the Fund's control by the Communist Party. It would appear that despite their attempts to disassociate themselves the Party had a major influence in the running of the Fund. However, the Board of Trustees came from a variety of political and philanthropic backgrounds and there is no evidence to suggest that those who were not in receipt of benefit were discriminated against because they were non-Party members. At times the Committee acted ruthlessly to protect scarce resources for those it felt were most

⁵² *And After*, 1939, p.6.

deserving and needy. At its height a staggering £700 per week was paid in grants, when the average allowance to spouses with children was 30/- and wounded volunteers received £1 5/-. It can be estimated that in addition to all the injured men who served in Spain, approximately half of the families of Brigaders, not all of whom were dependant on them, were assisted. Considering the organisation was self-funded, by a labour movement hit by the Depression, it was an astonishing achievement.

Despite efforts to keep Fund and Party separate the successful administering of Dependants' Aid was one of the key factors in the maintenance of a good relationship between Party and family. The other was the work of the Communist Party leader Harry Pollitt.

Pollitt & Party Relations with Family

Archives show that Pollitt was dedicated to the well-being of both volunteers and their families. He oversaw all correspondence personally. When Mrs McWhirter and Mrs Ball sent in donations to aid Spain funds they both received individually drafted letters. In letters to these two women Pollitt also took the time to defend and praise the actions of the volunteers in spite of both of them already being convinced.

Your son Tom together with so many others of the finest and best of our Comrades in Britain is doing magnificent work with the British Battalion...and we are very proud of our comrades and also of their families...⁵³

Pollitt was one of the few members of the Communist Party leadership who saw the political necessity of maintaining a good relationship with the volunteers' next of kin. It made good sense to remain on good terms with the relatives and not purely for propaganda purposes. Family often believed the Party had manipulated them. Owen's mother believed this of her local Party members who enthusiastically recruited her husband and then, after he was killed, left her and the children 'high and dry' with no allowance or death certificate. This treatment could leave bitterness

⁵³ Letter from Harry Pollitt to J. McWhirter, dated 21 May 1937, CP/TND/POLL/2/6, NMLH.

towards the Party for many years⁵⁴ and in this particular instance they lost an active member of the local Party.

In August 1938 a scandal blew up over the recruitment of underage volunteers. The father of one such young man had gone to the press. The Secretariat deemed the subsequent publicity harmful to their political work.

Once it is established that we have misused the names of prominent political personalities we will find all of our united front work jeopardised.⁵⁵

However, the sensitive management of what historians have termed the 'human consequences' of the civil war,⁵⁶ was not merely an exercise in propaganda. It had much to do with Pollitt's emotional attachment to the men who had volunteered for Spain. During the Communist Party's anti-war stance between 1939-1941 it was Pollitt, who voiced support for the war against Hitler due to,

...the strong feelings which had been aroused by what I had witnessed in Spain and the responsibility I feel I had in regard to the sacrifice made by the British Battalion of the International Brigade...⁵⁷

That sense of responsibility can also be linked to the well-being of their families. One only has to examine the surviving papers and letters of Pollitt to appreciate the tremendous amount of time he spent in dealing with all enquiries by relatives. Often after Pollitt had spoken at the meetings he gave all over the country, crowds of relatives would bombard him with requests for information on volunteers in Spain they had not heard from for weeks. Countless letters were also delivered to Party HQ requesting the whereabouts of their next of kin. Consequently communications between King Street and Spain were frequent. In among Pollitt's papers in Manchester is a handwritten list of names made to secure news of their whereabouts.

⁵⁴ Interview with Owen, 18 August 1999.

⁵⁵ Letter to the Secretariat, dated 1 August 1938, Box C – 24/1, International Brigade Collection, MML.

⁵⁶ F. Beckett, *Enemy Within*, 1995, p.53.

⁵⁷ In K. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 1993, p.96.

By each volunteer listed were Pollitt's handwritten notes, 'OK,' 'wounded,' 'no details,' 'missing,' 'tomorrow.' These brief reminders became kind, reassuring letters to troubled relatives. A standardised reply was sent to all those whose family member appeared to be 'OK.'

I have gone very carefully through the lists that have been supplied to us of all those who were killed or wounded in the recent battle in Spain and Comrade Maley's name is not among these lists which means he is quite alright.⁵⁸

Letters to those wounded or missing were always personalised because of the euphemistic approach required. Replies, unlike some of the Dependants' Aid correspondence were speedily dealt with. To the parents of missing volunteer John Walkinson, Pollitt wrote,

On Sunday night in Liverpool you asked me about J.W. Walkinson. I am assured that enquiries are being made from all various hospitals to which the wounded were sent and can rest assured that as soon as we get any news of our comrade, we shall let you know.⁵⁹

So many relatives were enquiring about their loved ones in Spain because of the serious problem of both delivering and getting mail out of the battle zones. Pollitt responded to two different letters on the same day explaining how the postal situation was beyond their control and that they had done all that they could to rectify it.⁶⁰ Frequently in letters that had fairly positive news for relatives Pollitt would add a sweetener, glorifying the volunteers. "...the British Battalion will take no small place, for it has, by its valour and high courage, made a name for itself which will go down in history."⁶¹ He recognised the inappropriateness of forcing Party language and propaganda on the anxious or bereaved but the opportunity was not lost in more

⁵⁸ An example of a standard letter sent. This one is from Harry Pollitt to Mr Maley, dated 16 March 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH.

⁵⁹ Letter from Harry Pollitt to John Walkinson, dated 16 March 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH. It is not known what happened to J. Walkinson.

⁶⁰ Letters to Eliza Bridge, dated 19 March 1937 and W, McClure. CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH.

⁶¹ Letter from Harry Pollitt to Mrs McClure, dated 19 March 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH.

favourable circumstances to publicise the heroism of the volunteers and promote their legendary status. Unsurprisingly Pollitt always strongly defended the actions of the Party against the complaints of angry relatives but attempted at all times to be tactful and truthful. A letter requesting the return of a fallen volunteer's body to England was firmly dealt with.

I know that it will be impossible for Cmd Whitehead's body to be brought to England and I would not attempt to deceive you on this question.⁶²

The CPGB leader's aim to keep all dependants informed was aided considerably by former volunteers. They also played a major role in smoothing over rifts between relatives and local Party officials. Frank Graham, who proudly wrote to Pollitt regarding an exhaustive schedule of visiting, "...practically all the relatives of dead, wounded and missing...from the North East," commented on local Party leaders distancing themselves from the relatives. He had succeeded by his visits and "...talks with the comrades concerned," to have eased the situation.⁶³ Graham, as well as Pollitt, was all too aware of how damaging discontent among relatives was to the Party's image. As an ex-Brigader Graham would, to a certain extent, have been able to empathise with the next of kin, very much as Fred Copeman did.

District branches could also be important in terms of showing their concern and solidarity with the family. The South Wales district wrote a personalised letter of encouragement and companionship to the parents of Tom Jones, who had been taken prisoner in Spain.

We were terribly glad to know that although he is in prison he is well. For myself, I could hardly speak with the joy I felt... This news must bring you and John real

⁶² Letter from Harry Pollitt to Marion Teesdale, dated 20 April 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH. Frank Whitehead from Manchester was killed at Jarama in February.

⁶³ Letter from Frank Graham to Harry Pollitt, dated 16 April 1936 [sic] more likely 1938, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH.

happiness and it will help to make you well again.⁶⁴

In Spain the Political Commissars conducted a similar job of reassurance and query sorting, this time on behalf of the anxious volunteers.

'Now for the Usual,' Political Commissars Domestic Duties

During the war in Spain, Political Commissars found themselves responsible for the emotional as well as political well-being of the Battalion. As the civil war progressed it became increasingly difficult to keep up morale in the face of numerous requests for repatriation and concerns about what was happening to dependants in Britain. This often affected the volunteers' ability to concentrate fully. Much of the Commissars' time was devoted to dealing with queries and typing reports entitled, 'Repatriation and Allowance Questions'⁶⁵ to the London headquarters requesting instructions and information. Signs of impatience and frustration crept into these communications. Certainly many felt their most important task was "to develop the political understanding of the volunteers,"⁶⁶ not to sort out domestic problems. Will Paynter headed one of his communiqués, 'Now for the Usual,'⁶⁷ implying these missives were a regular occurrence. Wally Tapsell ended a report to Pollitt, "This long list does not include many which GA [George Aitken] has fobbed off...[and] represent for the most part my failures."⁶⁸ The role of the Commissar became increasingly that of the 'middle man' fending off complaints and enquiries, seeking news and advice from the Party at home. They also had the job of deciding which volunteers were sincere in their requests. Although concerns, regarding family complications, were often genuine, some volunteers used them as an excuse to be repatriated. A. J. Howarth requesting leave was described as a "trouble-maker" and Tapsell very much doubted he would return to Spain if he was allowed to go.⁶⁹ L. Neal sought repatriation after the death of his father. He was left as the eldest and

⁶⁴ Letter from South Wales District Communist Party to Mrs Jones, not dated, SC291, SWCC.

⁶⁵ The heading of one of the reports sent back from Spain to Harry Pollitt.

⁶⁶ K. L. Hopkins, *Into the Heart of the Fire*, 1998, p.161.

⁶⁷ Will Paynter to Harry Pollitt, dated 6 July 1937, Box C – 15/2, MML.

⁶⁸ Wally Tapsell to Harry Pollitt, not dated, Box 39 – A/12, MML.

⁶⁹ Wally Tapsell to Harry Pollitt, not dated, Box 39 – A/12, MML.

therefore the breadwinner after losing two of his brothers at the front.⁷⁰ However there is no record of two Neal brothers having been killed.⁷¹

Many Political Commissars imagined their role to be one of political education when in fact it became extremely complex. Whilst existing documents suggest some found domestic queries a nuisance, it was very different when they came face-to-face with the stark human consequences of the war. Commissars in Spain were often cushioned from the traumatic effect the deaths had on the families but not always. Frank Graham saw this merely as an exercise in Party diplomacy but for Peter Kerrigan it was a harrowing experience. His wife, Rose, recalls how on leave she saw a “terrible change in him, he was very, very...morose...he seemed very within himself, he was really going grey because of the people he’d seen who had died in Spain having to take their effects home and seeing some of their people.”⁷²

However, the Communist Party did not only see the relatives as either passive victims of the war in Spain or merely as an encumbrance. The fact that they had initiated a fund for the dependant families demonstrates an acknowledgment of their responsibility to them.

The ‘Proper Spirit,’ Party Expectations of Family

The Party expected a certain mode of behaviour from family members, both as relatives of volunteers and as Communists because of their importance in boosting morale. A letter written by Pollitt to a bereaved parent stated,

I will send on your letter to our comrades in Spain for them to see the spirit in which the relatives of our fallen comrades are still carrying on.⁷³

Pollitt also praised relatives on their sacrifice in, “...so willingly sparing their loved ones in the fight.”⁷⁴ They must possess qualities of endurance and “the proper

⁷⁰ Wally Tapsell to Harry Pollitt, not dated, Box 39 – A/12, MML.

⁷¹ They do not appear on the official Roll of Honour in Bill Alexander’s *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, although recent research by Richard Baxell states this may not be complete.

⁷² Interview with Rose Kerrigan, 796/1, 1976, Spanish Civil War Collection, IWM.

⁷³ Letter from Harry Pollitt to M. L. Ball, dated 18 March 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH.

⁷⁴ Letter from Harry Pollitt to Mrs J. McWhirter, dated 21 May 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NMLH.

spirit”⁷⁵ if they were to be worthy of the socialist cause and the bravery of the volunteers. Numerous examples call upon this kind of forbearance. Wally Tapsell’s rather abrupt letter to the wife of a volunteer is fairly typical of how Communists expected exemplary behaviour from relatives.

I believe you have the interests of the movement at heart and if that is so you will understand that the responsibility rests upon you to help him carry through his duty as a soldier and a Communist...Such a comrade deserves inspiration and support and I look to you to give it to him in unstinted measure. Things may be hard for you – believe me they are ten thousand times harder for all of us out here.⁷⁶

More gentle encouragement came from the South Wales District Communist Party to Mrs Jones, whose son was a prisoner of war in Spain. “You must get better for his sake.”⁷⁷ It was Communists or politically active relatives who were all too aware of their obligations and how they should be reacting. Rose Kerrigan was an active member of the Party and seven months pregnant when her husband was asked to go to Spain. Forty years later she recalled, “Well I wasn’t happy...even comrades didn’t think it was fair to be sent away when you was like that and I would say well if I’d said no he wouldn’t have gone I suppose but I wouldn’t say no.”⁷⁸ Whether she considered this as her obligation as a Communist or as a wife was not explored in the interview. Ideals such as this were not restricted to the Communist Party. All ‘good socialists’ were expected to behave in a certain selfless way. May Edwards, the wife of ILP contingent leader Bob Edwards, wrote,

I wonder just how good a socialist I am when my greatest and dearest wish is to have you back with me.⁷⁹

However, the Communist Party, above all other parties of the left expected tremendous discipline in thought and behaviour from the relatives of volunteers,

⁷⁵ Frank Owen talks of the ‘proper spirit’ in a letter to his wife dated 18 June 1937, SC156, SWCC.

⁷⁶ Wally Tapsell to Mrs Anderson, not dated, Box 39 – A/12, MML.

⁷⁷ Letter from South Wales District Communist Party to Mrs Jones, not dated, SC291, SWCC.

⁷⁸ Interview with Rose Kerrigan, 796/1, IWM.

⁷⁹ Letter from May Edwards to Bob Edwards, dated 15 February 1937, Bob Edwards papers, NMLH.

particularly if they were Party members, appealing to their consciences as good comrades and to the worthiness of the volunteers. The latter was of especial importance to the Communist Party and is exemplified in the way the Party memorialised the Brigaders killed in Spain.

A Very Public Death

To die is not remarkable or important, for all must die.
The matter we have to concern ourselves with is what
did they die for? We are not here mourning our dead.
We are here to remember what they died for.⁸⁰

This was part of a speech delivered by Arthur Horner at a memorial ceremony in Mountain Ash, South Wales. It goes some way to illustrate how the Communist Party appropriated the deaths of men in Spain in terms of remembrance, which in turn became public property and also by providing symbolism and meaning to the families.

The memorialisation of the fallen gave a platform by which the men could be hero worshipped and deified. The majority of these services were organised by the Communist Party, local branches of trade unions and other left-wing political and educational movements. Family rarely made contributions to these ceremonies although they often attended. The most striking aspect of these gatherings was their similarity to religious occasions. Services to state world war dead were usually conducted in church and linked to fighting for God as well as King and Country. International Brigade memorial meetings, although secular, had many likenesses to the religious ceremony. Fred White's commemorative programme was headed 'Order of Service' and combined military traditions such as the 'Reveille' and the 'Last Post' with working-class and Welsh hymns and obituaries.⁸¹ However, it was the imagery that was used to give meaning to the volunteers' deaths that carried the most religious symbolism. In one of the rare occasions when a relative addressed a

⁸⁰ *Aberdare Leader*, 18 December 1938 in H. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 1984, p.250.

⁸¹ The service took place in Ogmore Vale, South Wales on 27 November 1938.

memorial meeting Leda Beckett, herself an active Communist spoke, of her husband Clem and others as giving up everything.

To take [their] place amongst those thousands of heroes who
fought and died so bravely that *we might live*.⁸²

The religious symbolism of sacrificing oneself to save others was a concept that played an integral part in the Communist Party's attempts to give meanings to the deaths, especially to bereaved family. Party activist Arthur Probert, writing to the mother of Tom Howell Jones said, "I must be frank and say that the fact was ever in my mind that one of my best friends would, before a long time had lapsed have fallen a martyr to the cause of human progress."⁸³ Their death in Spain became synonymous with the cause of fighting fascism and continually the condolences given to family by Communist Party members were littered with these public sentiments. "It is our hope that the thought of the cause for which he died will in some measure ease the pain which must be yours."⁸⁴ While the attempt to give reason, to what may have appeared to relatives as a meaningless death, may have provided a little comfort it could also have had the impact of driving alternative, oppositional displays of grief underground. Most families wished to express their grief privately but the Communist Party took great care to publicise emotions especially those of families who had strong Communist sympathies. Often their letters were used in propaganda souvenirs and pamphlets and showed a firm conviction in the ideals for which their relatives had died despite obvious sadness at their loss.

Whilst it has left a gap in our home, we feel proud that his death
shall be a monument in the fight for democracy of which he
believed.⁸⁵

⁸² *Clem Hero & Sportsman*, Manchester Dependents' Aid Committee, 1937, Box 39 – C/1, p.10.

⁸³ Letter from Arthur Probert to Mrs Jones, dated 9 September 1938, SC183c, SWCC.

⁸⁴ Letter from P. Bard to Mrs Morris, not dated, SC185c, SWCC.

⁸⁵ Brazell Thomas' family, Memorial Souvenir, not dated.

I know why he died. He died fighting back the advance of
Fascism, because he loved freedom and the rights of the
common people.⁸⁶

Their anger was directed at the Fascists and not the Communist Party. In stark contrast, one only gets to hear about the grief of non-Party members through 'non-official'⁸⁷ sources. Mrs Hamm rejected any connection with the Party, either its members, or their memorial service for her son. Susie's mother became violent at being told she should be proud to lose her son in the defence of democracy.⁸⁸ Many relatives, mostly apolitical, fought to keep their children and husband's deaths for themselves. This was made particularly difficult when the Party saw them as their own. Brigadier James Rutherford wrote to the wife of Harold Fry. "The loss you have suffered is great but the loss that the working-class movement in Britain has suffered is tremendous."⁸⁹ Her husband had thus been claimed for the Party in death, as well as in life.

To a certain extent families felt this 'political possession' of their relatives' lives and deaths has continued outside of the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War. At the funerals of International Brigade veterans the presence of their engagement in this one event and usually combined with an intense political life is dominant. Coffins are draped with the Battalion flag, the Secretary of the IBA gives an oration about their part in the Battalion, the anthem 'Jarama Valley' is sung. Thus their funeral services highlight the public aspects of their lives, usually with their time in Spain, when many had long, full lives after the British Battalion. Alternative voices are rarely heard at these remembrance occasions in spite of the opportunity afforded by the funeral for a more personal approach. Therefore, where funerals reflected similarities with memorial services for those killed in action⁹⁰ relatives generally made little contribution. Some believed the Party demanded certain standards and characteristics

⁸⁶ Mrs George Brown, Memorial Souvenir, not dated.

⁸⁷ Sources not related to official Communist Party archives.

⁸⁸ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

⁸⁹ Letter from James Rutherford to Mrs Fry, 18 October 1937, Box C – 18/6, MML.

⁹⁰ It must be noted that the relatives usually arrange funerals for veterans and so they must acquiesce to a strong political element to the service. The two examples I use, Fred Thomas' was arranged by a long-standing family friend and Mick's father's funeral by his mum, an active member of the Communist Party throughout her life. Two veterans also had humanist funerals and these had heavy involvement from their relatives. These were the father and husband of John and Kitty respectively.

of their members and that they had appropriated the veteran's death. Mick felt that the orations he was listening to at his father's funeral illustrated only one glorious part of his life. His father became a warrior and political agitator, not a parent who was often flawed.

We said a few words at me Dad's but it was Ruth Frow who got up, again she pedalled the Party line, she pedalled the myth of me Dad that wasn't totally me dad. It was all what he did forty, fifty years ago, it was all Spain. They hadn't got much to say beyond his trade union activity in the early post-war years because for most of our lives all we'd seen was me Dad disillusioned...emotionally unavailable to us.⁹¹

In a similar display over fifteen years later, the extraordinary life and career of Bill Alexander was celebrated at his funeral, which took place in July 2000. Many ex-Brigaders and prominent figures of the labour movement attended. Within this setting his daughter spoke alongside trade union leader and ex-volunteer Jack Jones.⁹² The relatives' participation at funerals corresponded and identified strongly with the public eulogies by figures outside of the family. Whilst the character and spirit of Fred Thomas was captured during orations of family friends, the Jarama song was still sung, an anthem Fred particularly disliked because it went against his own modest assessment of his achievements.⁹³

This chapter has so far been concerned with the role of the Communist Party towards family members during the conflict. Before embarking on the continuing influence and position of politics upon the lives of relatives after Spain it serves well to contrast the position of the state. How did they respond to family concerns and indeed to the volunteers themselves?

⁹¹ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

⁹² Further details of the funeral, such as the content of eulogies are not known.

⁹³ In an informal interview with Fred Thomas, November 1998, he remarked how much he disliked the words of the song.

'Thugs' and 'International Brigade Wallahs,' The Foreign Office Response

The attitudes of the state to International Brigaders and consequently their families are best illustrated by the Foreign Office who had the most dealings with volunteers and received much of the correspondence and enquiries from next of kin. In particular they dealt with many of the problems associated with deserters from the British Battalion because these were men less likely to be linked to the Communist Party. Consequently, requests for information came from apolitical relatives.

My sub-heading suggests that Foreign Office staff viewed the volunteers with a degree of contempt or as nuisances but it was never so clear-cut. Much evidence exists showing some consideration was shown particularly to worried relations, albeit often heightened by the intervention of illustrious third parties, such as MP's or solicitors.

The papers highlight that one of the Foreign Office's main concerns was to obtain information on the people and organisations responsible for recruiting volunteers and to uphold the integrity of government offices by preventing individuals from taking advantage of them. It would appear, from a letter sent to the Secretary of State, that the British Consulate in Valencia had naïvely believed they had eradicated Communist Party recruitment activities.

If the statements of these men were true...it would appear that
Communist organisations and possibly others of a similar
complexion are continuing their recruitmentactivities.⁹⁴

The threat posed by the Communist Party and the labour movement was not only in its recruitment operations but also the sophistication of its organisation. They were still offering allowances to the wives and dependants of men enlisting; therefore the incentive to volunteer remained. The Consulate believed the myth that the allowance, which was paid by the DAC, was paid straight out of Communist Party funds and was as much as £1 per week, indicating that the Foreign Office were worried enough

⁹⁴ Letter from British Consulate in Valencia to Secretary of State, Foreign Office, London, dated 16/9/37, FO/889/2/189, Public Record Office (PRO), Kew. The British Consulate had received information from two deserters, one who claimed they had been recruited at Communist Party Head quarters, Covent Garden. The Consulate expressed concern that this instance had occurred 'as recently as 14/7/37.'

about the Communist Party to readily accept information suggesting it was bigger and more influential than it actually was. The state was obsessed with keeping their part in the non-intervention pact intact. This was the result of a combination of factors; substantial commercial interests in Spain,⁹⁵ fear of the spread of communism and a policy of appeasement intent on avoiding war at any price. Such had been the importance of neutrality that the conservative government had decided to enforce the ancient Foreign Enlistment Act of 1870 in a feeble attempt to give credence to the Non-Intervention Agreement. Government departments rarely failed to quote the Act in their dealings with International Brigaders and their families. For example Mrs Flanagan, enquiring as to the whereabouts of her son, was reminded in the final paragraph of a letter from the British Consulate,

You are no doubt aware that your son's actions in enlisting in the Spanish forces was not only contrary to the declared policy of HM Government but may also expose him to prosecution under the Foreign Enlistment Act.⁹⁶

However, the attitudes of Foreign Office staff towards anxious relatives was not entirely preoccupied with the rigorous upholding of the law. Enquiries were dealt with in an efficient, fairly considerate, if brusque manner, considering their *modus operandi* was to remain as neutral as possible. "If I should hear of him in the near future I will not fail to communicate with you,"⁹⁷ can be compared with, "Mr Eden regrets that he is not in a position to institute enquiries regarding the welfare of British citizens fighting in Spain or to secure their return in this country,"⁹⁸ shows the variation in attitude.

Anthony Eden, Secretary of State at the time, was at pains to stress the unlikelihood of being able to trace the brother of an anxious relative,

⁹⁵ These commercial interests included mining, sherry, textiles, olive oil and cork. P. Preston, *A Concise History of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.101.

⁹⁶ Letter from British Consulate, Valencia to Mrs Flanagan, dated 31/8/37, FO/889/2/4, PRO.

⁹⁷ Letter from British Consulate Valencia to Mrs Keegan, not dated, FO/889/2/10, PRO.

⁹⁸ Letter from Foreign Office, London to Mrs C. Thomas, 1/5/37, FO/889/2/55, PRO.

I think it only fair to your correspondent to say that we have unfortunately never yet been able to obtain positive information in cases of this kind.⁹⁹

However, the Consulate in Valencia were delighted when two weeks later they were able to inform him that his brother had been located.

Not unlike the Communist Party the Foreign Office was also frank in their dealings with family members if somewhat condescending.

You will understand that this is not an ordinary war, that records of casualties and the location of graves etc. are not treated in the same way as the Great War.¹⁰⁰

Whether their attitude was intentional, as a means of proving they were right not to condone volunteering, it is difficult to determine. Certainly the British Consulate in Valencia was markedly more sympathetic than either the Foreign Office in London or the Consulate in Madrid and this will be illustrated further by their dealings with the volunteers with whom they came into direct contact. Relatives wrote to the Foreign Office often as a last resort, although very few had prior contact with the Communist Party, "...they are afraid of writing to you in case it causes trouble."¹⁰¹ It can be assumed that most of these relatives were apolitical as their attitudes towards the Party were censorious, either for recruiting their kin in the first place or because of what they deemed their lack of care or knowledge.

I am told he was given a safe job at the base. My son tells me he has been in several air raids which does not seem very safe to me.¹⁰²

The people or society who influenced his going to Spain do not know anything and seem incapable of obtaining news.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Anthony Eden to Alderman Logan, dated 24/6/37, FO/889/2/17, PRO.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from British Consulate Valencia to Mr William Bogle, dated 11/6/37, FO/889/2/24, PRO.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Catherine Thomas to British Consulate Valencia, not dated, FO/889/2/54, PRO.

¹⁰² Letter from Mrs M. Weaving to British Consulate Valencia, dated 17/5/37, FO/889/2/44, PRO.

The consulates also seemed to try harder at obtaining answers for anxious relatives when a third party was involved. It comes as little surprise that they were seen to be doing more with the added weight of a solicitor or MP behind the relative. Clearly the consulates saw this kind of intervention as denoting a family with middle-class credentials. They took great pains to bring home Mr Michael Gould and two of his friends from Spain at the behest of A. W. Parkin-Moore of Buckingham Palace Road.¹⁰⁴ His return may also have been quickened by the fact that his family were prepared to pay up front for his passage and that of his friends. These were the kind of people that the Foreign Office and consulates would be eager to please.

Volunteers presented very different problems for the state officials. The opinion that the Foreign Office in London and the Consulates in Madrid and especially Valencia held of the volunteers was one of embarrassment and not a little contempt. In the early stages of the conflict the Foreign Office, at the direction of Anthony Eden were eager to dispatch deserters as quickly as possible back to England. Procedures were put in place not only for a speedy return, where no passports were available emergency certificates were granted,¹⁰⁵ but also as a means of drawing these men to the attention of the authorities.

2. The object of this procedure is to warn His Majesty's authorities concerned that the persons in question have served with the Spanish forces.¹⁰⁶

However, after openly evacuating deserters from the Spanish Army back to Britain the authorities in Spain clamped down ordering that the men be detained in concentration camps.¹⁰⁷ This dictate was a considerable inconvenience for the British Consulates in Spain on two counts. Firstly it made it diplomatically impossible, as well as time consuming and difficult, for Foreign Office staff to arrange the release

¹⁰³ Letter from Jessie Frazer to Foreign Secretary, sent to British Consulate Valencia, dated 17/4/37, FO/889/2/51, PRO.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from A.W. Parkin-Moore to British Consulate, Valencia, dated 1/4/37, FO/889/2/105, PRO.

¹⁰⁵ Working-class men had rarely travelled abroad and did not have the time or resources to apply for a full passport. It was most usual for them to be given a weekend ticket to Paris. H. Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 1984, p.158.

¹⁰⁶ Foreign Office directive to British Consulate Madrid, dated 17/3/37, FO/ 889/2/102, PRO.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from British Consulate Valencia to British Consulate Madrid, dated 21/4/37, FO/889/2/101, PRO.

of International Brigaders on behalf of the relatives. This was due to the fact that as part of the Spanish Army the men were 'liable for service for the duration of the war.' Thus once volunteers had joined up with the British Battalion, unless they deserted, the Consulate could not legally intervene. Ironically, once men did leave the Spanish Army without permission and presented themselves on the doorstep of either Consulate the records suggest they were more of an encumbrance to staff than if they had continued to fight. Foreign Office staff were left with the problem of where to house the men until suitable arrangements for transportation to a concentration camp could be arranged. This problem boiled over into exasperation clearly shown by a letter written by the consul at Valencia to the Medical Officer on HMS Woolwich,

One of my thugs has relapsed with jaundice and the other has
bad toothache. I had hoped to have had them off my hands by
now...¹⁰⁸

The consul at Madrid at this stage had had far fewer dealings with Brigaders or deserters. He writes that, "[t]he boys may be misguided but after all they are our nationals and to leave them in the fighting forces is tantamount to leaving them to die."¹⁰⁹ This was written just five days before notification came through that men were to be sent to concentration camps, thus prolonging their stay with the consulates.

By June 1937 Madrid referred to the men as 'International Brigade wallahs' a derogatory term for a worker, which implies they too were experiencing problems in dealing with them. Valencia however always appeared to be less sympathetic than Madrid and seemed cold in its direct contact with the men, for example sending back money sent by them for the purchase of periodicals.¹¹⁰ Yet this did belie an interest in the welfare of the men illustrated not only by Madrid's concern that they were

¹⁰⁸ Dated 27/4/37, FO/889/2/99, PRO.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from British Consulate Madrid to British Consulate Valencia, dated 16/4/37, FO/889/2/103, PRO.

¹¹⁰ Letter dated 10/6/37, FO/889/2/27, PRO.

British citizens but also endeavours, however cursory, to find out the whereabouts of volunteers on behalf of relatives.

The interest the consulate in Valencia took in the fortunes of James Donald was perhaps more cynical. Donald, a deserter, was moved to Madrid for interrogation most likely by agents of the Communist Party. "Should you hear anything about him I will be interested to receive the news."¹¹¹ The Foreign Office displayed a tenacious curiosity in the movements of communist organisations. This obsession can be balanced by their demonstrations of seasonal goodwill to men held at a concentration camp called *Celvar de Valencia*. Men there thanked the Consulate for shoes and warm clothing.¹¹² Whatever the motive behind this gesture it resulted in the men spending a more comfortable Christmas. The Foreign Office was always more concerned with rooting out organisations or individuals recruiting volunteers and handing over names to government agencies.

Their dealings with relatives were considerably more tactful than with volunteers or deserters who they saw as an encumbrance. This was especially after the Consulates were obliged to send the men to concentration camps. To a certain extent they were concerned with their welfare as British citizens and they did show compassion to relatives, particularly if they involved a third party. Yet always lingers the impression that the whole question of the International Brigade was an inconvenient and embarrassing episode for the Foreign Office.

THE POLITICAL LEGACY ON FAMILY LIFE

The influence of politics and the Communist Party was not just confined to the deaths of veterans. Their dedication obviously affected families throughout their lives. Certain aspects of the specific contribution of the Spanish Civil War to family relationships will be explored in Chapter Four, including the continual presence of the Brigade within personal interactions and the ambiguity felt by relations towards veterans' contributions to the war. There is however the bigger picture involving the repercussions of Communist Party membership on family life.

¹¹¹ Letter from British Consulate Valencia to British Consulate Madrid, dated 31/5/37, FO/889/2/36, PRO.

¹¹² Letter from Celvar de Valencia to British Consulate Valencia, 29,12,37, FO/889/2/134, PRO.

The Undeniable Link

The most striking feature of political allegiances among veterans was their membership of the Communist Party, illustrated in **Appendix Five**. Only two were Labour Party and one Independent Labour Party. Therefore was it inevitable that children, grandchildren and partners would follow with similar loyalties? The vigour of veterans' political education (described below) to both partners and their children whilst growing up shows how hard many of them tried to assert a continuum of Communist allegiance.

During the interviews very few respondents volunteered information about their political preferences as they grew up. This may point towards either a general lack of interest in politics or the absence of politicisation within the family home although there are exceptions. Those who were members of the Young Communist League (YCL) appear to have been as dedicated as their veteran relative. Respondents who stated no political affiliation were equally concerned to assert their own independence from their relative such as Mark, or distance themselves from the organisation that had been responsible for recruiting volunteers in the case of Owen.

Eight relatives belonged to the Communist Party or YCL in earlier life. All of those were politically active, at the time of being interviewed, the majority with the Communist Party. The Party was still the most popular choice among relatives in adulthood or after living for many years under the influence of the veteran. This means that they did listen in some degree to veterans trying to educate them in the ways of the Party and with its image of the International Brigade.

A Political Education

The oral tradition of political lecturing from veteran to relative may have been as a result of volunteers in Spain being given similar treatment by political commissars, the political educators of the Brigaders. The communist ethos of discipline and its verbally repetitive nature may have stuck with ex-Brigaders and influenced them in their own oral transmission of political experience. As **Appendix Five** illustrates the majority of veterans in the sample were CPGB members and so conversations could

centre on anything from Marxist thought or their account of the controversial role of the Soviet Union in Spain.¹¹³ Allegiance to the Communist Party was sought by justifying its part in suppressing the revolutionary activities of the POUM thereby underlining the legitimacy of the International Brigade who were inexplicably linked with the Communists. For many veterans these features became an important part of the political education. Some children also spoke of being treated like adults when there were discussions about politics.

The orality of their political education was therefore not always lecture based but could be quite informal. Children may have sat quietly whilst the adults thrashed out political arguments amongst themselves. Dora learnt much by listening in on her father's conversations with Communist Party colleagues on the way home from meetings. Given this natural, inclusive approach in some families it is not difficult to appreciate why so many children went on to become politically active themselves. As the majority of veterans were members of the CPGB their influence was used to instil a certain version of events that corresponded closely with the 'official' history of the International Brigade. Thus the veterans' purpose in educating their children was partially linked to *defending the image of the Battalion. This became an imperative at the end of World War Two. All of the children in the sample were growing up during the Cold War period when anti-Communist propaganda was at its zenith. Mick recalls that his father's association with the Party turned him from a hero to a villain very quickly. The Cold War presented a strong incentive for the ex-volunteers to defend their image by influencing the political development of their offspring or partners. The most direct approach within the sample incorporated attempts to direct reading matter. A few relatives were made to feel very uncomfortable, as if they were in the act of betrayal because they had chosen to read *Homage to Catalonia*.*¹¹⁴ The impact of Orwell's memoir has already been discussed but some veterans also influenced the way their relatives viewed the book. Martha did not read it with any great enthusiasm because her husband did not approve. He

¹¹³ Dora spoke of her first lessons in politics, "I was introduced I should say to Marxism by Dad. He told me the difference between quantitative and qualitative changes." 24 August 1998.

¹¹⁴ These included Lydia and Martha.

told her she should not read it.¹¹⁵ The response of Lydia's mother represents the feelings of many Communist Party activists towards Orwell's account.

I remember having arguments with my mother after reading *Homage to Catalonia* because of course Orwell was part of the wrong crowd. He was persona non grata for people like my mother and she was almost horrified that I would even read him.¹¹⁶

Her mother's reaction made a deeper impression on her than the contents of the book that she had forgotten. The pressure for Lydia to conform was perhaps two-fold. Her father Alfred, also interviewed, revealed his own reservations about the text that were linked into Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom*. "The whole thing was distorted. Orwell had an influence on him [Loach]. Orwell was very much connected with the POUM."¹¹⁷ Even Mark, uninfluenced by his mother's politics and remaining apolitical all of his life, could not bring himself to read Orwell or see Loach's film.

Because of my inherited hostility to what my mother saw as detractors I wasn't able to read *Homage to Catalonia* until four or five years ago. I had such hostility to it... the idea that he betrayed the cause that stayed with me for years.¹¹⁸

Likewise, until fairly recently James could not bring himself to read Orwell "because I hated it so much."¹¹⁹ This again was about loyalty. Many developed through family and political ties a strong identification with the anti-fascist cause and the vilification of the Trotskyist interpretation of events by the Communist Party. Thus to read the opposition or 'what their enemies had written' provoked strong feelings of disloyalty. James has still not read *Homage to Catalonia*. These reactions may point towards a more complex, less simplistic feeling towards the memoir. It suggests that not only was Orwell associated with being anti-Communist and pro-POUM but any link with volunteers outside of the International Brigade, for example the ILP, was

¹¹⁵ Interview with Martha, 15 March 1999.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Lydia, 1 December 1998.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Alfred, 1 December 1998.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Mark, 27 June 1999.

¹¹⁹ Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

seen as a slur on the Battalion not exclusively related to the Communist Party. Even veterans who were not members of the Communist Party in Spain and have been critical of their role during the conflict are reticent about defending the ILP contingent.¹²⁰

The influence of the political education was clearly illustrated by the numbers of children who became active in trade unions, political parties or campaigned through pressure groups and demonstrations. Nine of the thirteen sons, all three daughters and both grandchildren interviewed were active in one or more of the above ways. Although their 'education' was often defensive and in some instances dictatorial, they were not wholly indoctrinated. Many of the children in their formative years joined the YCL but they were able to find their own expression of political activity, whether this was remaining with the Communist Party or following other left-wing routes.¹²¹ (See **Appendix Five**) However, the discussion and debating of ideas central to the Brigade ideology was crucial in making an impression that was more than folklore based (as with much anecdotal transference). Ray stated that the association with many Brigaders was a key contribution to his own political activity. It often influenced and inspired their lives outside of simply public expressions of the civil war such as attending local memorial gatherings. For some despite an intensely political upbringing they feel the decision to be involved with political issues has been their own. "I wouldn't say that Spain has influenced my politics. I think I'd be a communist anyway,"¹²² a reaction no more unusual when compared with the other extreme of apolitical children not influenced by their upbringing.

The Impact of the Communist Crisis

Relatives were far more likely to remain within the Communist Party or New Communist Party throughout their lives if their parent or partner had kept faith with the Soviet Union. This was in spite of an increasing number of disillusionments such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia. A handful of respondents spoke of the significance of events such as the invasion of Hungary in 1956, Khrushchev's Secret Speech

¹²⁰ Letters from Fred Thomas and Lance Rogers.

¹²¹ For example Mick now describes himself as an environmental socialist. Interview 5 August 1999.

¹²² Interview with Joe, November 1999.

revealing Stalin's paranoia and the Prague Spring of 1968, in the political lives of their relative. Mark described how this also affected his mother's social circle,

Mother lost a great many friends after the exposure of Stalin.¹²³

Brothers Neil and Nigel remember their father leaving the Communist Party after the Hungarian uprising.¹²⁴ These events and their parent's reaction to it must have had an influence on the decisions of some of the 'don't knows' in **Appendix Five**. Yet only Mick openly discusses the effect this had on his membership of the YCL. He talks of confusion as he began to realise that Russia was not a utopia as they had all thought but had been 'run by a monster.'¹²⁵

Despite events in Europe and the loss of the romantic ideal of the Communist Party a few relatives spoke of joining the Party during this period. James ran as a Communist Party candidate in the 1964 General Election¹²⁶ and Ray toyed with membership in the early 1980's enthused not by outside stimulus but by working on a book about his grandfather.¹²⁷

The Party's fall from popularity among its most likely supporters could never be solely dictated by Moscow's oppression of Eastern Europe. The decline in the romantic image of the Party that had been heightened by their links to the International Brigade was as a result of the period after World War Two and the emergence of a state of cold war. The mythological status of the Party remained largely untarnished for the eight politically active relatives listed in **Appendix Five** and this had much to do with its close connection to the International Brigade and activity during the 1930's. The spirit and glamour that encapsulated that era, and the feeling that choices were simple remained a strong memory keeping many loyal to the Party. The development of the Cold War made holding onto these images far more complicated, especially for some family members who had not been so involved in the heady days of the civil war. The nastiness and recriminations that

¹²³ Interview with Mark, 27 June 1999.

¹²⁴ Personalised questionnaires of Neil, July 2000 and Nigel, February 2000.

¹²⁵ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹²⁶ Questionnaire of James.

¹²⁷ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

characterised the McCarthy era in 1950's America were partly replicated in some working-class communities in Britain. The problems that accompanied Mick's father's fall from heroic status were numerous. The romanticism of the Brigade years and the euphoria of victory against German Nazism were quickly forgotten. The Communist Party no longer symbolised the champion of the underdog. It had become overnight a menace. This was to cause problems in some households. Mick explained how his brothers, who had not been born during the heroic years, were affected,

[They] really resented it, they grew up Cold War and the ridicule and the nastiness, it was too much for them...I think it was too painful for them so they rejected it.¹²⁸

The Party was overwhelmingly present in family life where parents were politically active and therefore I will discuss some of the problems faced by individuals in the years after the Second World War.

Communist Children and Families: The Juggling Act

The interviews conducted by Phil Cohen¹²⁹ of children of prominent Communists share similar familial and wider social experiences with some of the children of International Brigaders also closely connected with the Party. Several general themes feature in both sets of interviews. One was the importance of Party and public over the personal in family matters. Another that interaction between Party members involved contacts with their family. Finally, it was important to explore how outside political events affected inter-familial and extra-social relationships.

The characteristics that dominated the behaviour of the 'ideal' Communist were transmuted onto family dynamics. This often resulted in family members, especially partners and children, becoming secondary to political activity. This could be put down in some instances to the patriarchal structure of the family. Hywel Francis saw this as the reason for the dominance of politics within his family. Few women in the

¹²⁸ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹²⁹ P. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, 1997.

Welsh mining community where he grew up were politically active.¹³⁰ Their role was predominantly over the private sphere of the home. Men, more likely to be involved with politics, dominated the public arena and family life with their involvement.

I can never remember a time when my father wasn't politically active...there were long absences when he was away at conferences or meetings.¹³¹

A more extreme case saw Martin Jones and his siblings fostered out to a children's home for a couple of months whilst his mother was in hospital because his father would not give up his political work.¹³² Mick experienced not only his father but also his mother out at meetings instead of at home; which he felt had a detrimental effect on family relationships. When both parents were involved with the Communist Party, as was the case with three of the relatives I spoke to, home life could suffer. It may have meant coming home from school to an empty house with no dinner prepared. Child-parent relationships were deeply affected by the latter's dedication to Party business. This manifested itself in drastic ways. Communist doctrine, for example, dictated that family was not important and that it, "...did try to be impersonal and did diminish the importance of individual families."¹³³ As individualism was discouraged, so too was dedication to the private and to home life over the Party. It was perhaps the commitment to humanity, as opposed to human beings as individuals that enabled men to leave their families.

It was absolutely ludicrous: in my family it meant that my Dad insisted on going to war, leaving behind a wife and a four-year old with me born three months after he was killed.¹³⁴

For some children in the sample their parents' dedication to political life was 'normal' and because they mentioned no adverse affects it was a situation they fully

¹³⁰ P. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, 1997, p.123.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p.124.

¹³² *ibid.*, p162-163.

¹³³ *ibid.*, p.155.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p171.

appreciated and supported. Len matter of factly stated, "I was just brought up in a household where three nights a week they were at meetings and that sort of thing."¹³⁵

Joe emphasised the self-sacrifice of his father and showed a real pride in his heavy work schedule. "He was incredibly active in the union and in the Party, he was out there campaigning at meetings virtually every night and this on top of this incredibly hard job."¹³⁶ He makes no mention of how this affected life at home. It possibly wasn't an important feature because Joe is so dedicated himself to the political life.

Children also spoke of only getting to know parents in later life. Brian Pollitt, aged twenty at the time, recalled personal and political exchanges with his father he hadn't experienced before because he was forced to convalesce after a serious illness. Martin Green wrote that, "my mother was someone whom I came closer to as she grew older."¹³⁷ Likewise, Mick got on better with his elderly father, not only because he had mellowed with age but because he was less able to take part in meetings and the socials that accompanied them. The lessening of the political focus physically, if not always mentally, re-established a relationship resembling the more normal patterns between parent and offspring.

This did not mean that the formative years in the child's development were devoid of affection and interaction within the family unit. Children of Party members were aware from a very early age that they were 'different.' Whether they were involved in Party activities such as attending meetings (Dora), helping to deliver leaflets (Mick) or making the tea at socials (Owen) or quite simply because their houses were continually full of other activists or Brigaders. Michael Rosen talked of the culture of 'CP Kids,'¹³⁸ the children of other members who would knock around with each other. However, in the sample of interviews with Brigaders children they concentrated on the adult world. This can almost certainly be linked to the 'adventurous' image of the Brigade warriors, especially for young sons of veterans. Foreign visitors were particularly exciting. [Dad] spoke of 'exotic' Yugoslavs around the Sunday lunch table.¹³⁹ Mick recalled American Air Force guys and "a load of

¹³⁵ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998.

¹³⁶ Interview with Joe, November 1999.

¹³⁷ *A Chronicle of Small Beer*, introduction to unpublished manuscript written by Martin Green, p.7.

¹³⁸ P. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, 1997, p.53.

¹³⁹ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998.

politicians from other countries.”¹⁴⁰ It was not always welcome as he often woke up with strange people asleep beside him, or spread out over the sofa or eating the week’s supply of apple pies made by his Gran. Lydia saw her mother as the centre of an extended family of international friends. Her parents entertained Party members with a political film club in a hut her father had built in the garden.

One of my earliest memories is of people flocking in to see usually what they had, the programme was very political.¹⁴¹

These circles of Communist friends that many dedicated activists surrounded themselves with made their children feel very much that they were different, special in some way. For some they may have acted as a bulwark against international events, which profoundly disrupted the family lives of Communist Party members.

Yes other International Brigaders constantly came to visit. My parents kept in touch with them and many were quite close friends. For example, Annie, George and Tom Murray and Steve Fullarton...I remember thinking Annie and George Murray were really warm people.¹⁴²

The onset of the Cold War brought differing degrees of public and private experience. Often children struggled with personal relationships affected by their parents’ ideological position. Many Party members would obstinately defend Soviet actions and the character of Stalin. This was made especially difficult after Khrushchev’s Secret Speech in 1956. Len revealed a lot of lying went on in his family, certain things he knew were not to be mentioned, there was an atmosphere of secrecy. This was taken a step further in Martin Jones’ house. His father’s hard-line attitude imposed a ban on political enquiry of any kind.

There must have been a few reasons for the camps, the Gulags but I never spoke about it, I didn’t dare.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Lydia, 1 December 1998.

¹⁴² Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

Associations outside of the private sphere also had extremes of experience. Lydia brought up in Buckinghamshire was only mildly aware that some of their neighbours had prevented their children associating with 'known Reds.' Yet some inner city communities and schools appeared to be rife with 'anti-Commie' prejudice. Mike Power brought up in Deptford remembered, "It was obvious at school and in the neighbourhood that we were not in the political mainstream – the people living next door blanked us out."¹⁴⁴ The position of Mick's father as a prominent Communist brought vehement reactions from his working-class community. The legendary status afforded to him as a Brigader was soon forgotten in a wave of anti-Communist hysteria. He had failed to become homogenised into the majority view of the close concentration of people. Their association doubly affected children of the International Brigaders who remained strongly Communist throughout the post-war period. International Brigade myth had to be upheld alongside the image propounded by the Soviet party machine. For younger children it was often an adventurous time being part of adult activity surrounded by unusual visitors. The teenage years brought not only the usual problems but also a realisation for some that they had been secondary to their parents' political activity.

Children from political families growing up during this Cold war period would also have been strongly immersed in the political and social happenings of their own generation. The 1960's brought about social freedoms that had to be balanced with the prudish and paternalistic attitude of the Communist Party often adhered to by their parents.

Teenage rebellion was not easy when you were told that saving
the world from imperialism was the key thing in life.¹⁴⁵

It was yet another dimension of the difficult path the teenage children of political parents had to negotiate. However, for the majority of the relatives interviewed they went on to join similar political youth organisations such as the YCL. Does this

¹⁴³ P. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, 1997, p.163.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.172.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.14.

suggest that their upbringing in a political household had a strong influence, despite any difficulties encountered?

Conclusions

To deny the overwhelmingly strong influence of the Communist Party and politics on family life, in the light of testimony and statistics, would be to leave a huge gap in the experience of the majority of family members both during and after the civil war. It dominated practicalities such as the way people survived whilst volunteers were away and sometimes the stories they had to listen to after the war. Yet the Communist Party were very limited in their understanding of private affairs. The orthodoxy of the Party meant an inability on the part of many officials to empathise with the anxieties of relatives or to afford them a place in any grieving processes. Consequently the image of the volunteers was tightly controlled by the Party both then and now holding a commanding position over the construction of mythology and romanticism, even rational argument, connected to the Brigade. The family of many veterans continue to be influenced by the political debates whether they want to be or not. Many experience a sense of obligation and loyalty to the official history of the British Battalion.

Certainly the Communist Party, despite its troubled existence since the Cold War, has exerted an incredible impact on the families of ex-volunteers. The physical presence of the Party in the home lives of many of the children added, on the positive side, glamour and adventure opening up a unique adult world to them and negatively a yearning for a 'normal' childhood which saw them the centre or focus of their parent(s)' lives. Yet this is only half of the story of the relatives. Lives both during and after Spain also operated outside of a dominating political sphere. The civil war had consequences and repercussions other than those associated with the Communist Party and labour movement.

CHAPTER FOUR

A FREEDOM FIGHTER IN THE FAMILY

The short-term impact of the civil war on relatives of British Brigaders deals with the period during the conflict. The majority of volunteers leaving relatives behind were men who left a huge financial as well as emotional space in the family home. 'Leaving Come What May' discusses the relatives' special role in the study of the effects of war by illustrating the diversity of individual responses to the extreme behaviour of the volunteers. In addition there is the role of extended family and community as a means of emotional if not financial support. Relatives also showed through their letters to volunteers in Spain, how they too despite being hard pressed themselves provided emotional support. Were the reactions to the 'Return of the Hero' the straightforward homogenised response of relatives welcoming back mythical heroes? Certainly 'Understanding their Loss' shows it was not so simple or easy for many, especially the bereaved.

The long-term impact on post-Spain household is also discussed. This period in family history importantly reveals a whole community of people hitherto ignored, bearing in varying degrees the problems of adjusting to living with individuals who had experienced a life-changing event. These groups of relatives show that even though they did not participate the effects were still profound. For example, Spain had a significant impact on some spouses who felt bored or jealous of its continual presence in their husband-wife relationship.

As a group the relatives of International Brigaders have the potential to show many more kinds of responses than the friends of volunteers. The proximity of relatives to veterans is closer. Families are more aware of the less favourable sides of living with a hero and could be more comfortable with criticising them. Friends appeared so much more uncritical. The dead became martyrs in their eyes, the living idolised. Family were closer in terms of experiencing the more unpleasant, difficult aspects of the short traumatic event.

I have chosen to discuss the more private elements of family life in this chapter. These include the emotional repercussions, such as longing and grief and the

transmission of personal experience unaffected by more public representations like politics or open expressions of memory in the shape of memorials and reunions.

THE SHORT-TERM IMPACT

Leaving Come What May

It was essential it was top secret because the non-intervention pact was on...the night before he went...he said to my father 'give me an early call in the morning'...my father was always up early...and he got up...now he knows he's going to Spain nobody else knows and he did something, he went back upstairs and kissed my younger brother.¹

Naturally my father was curious as to where I was going and I said, 'oh I won't be long' and stole away. I took one last look at my father as I had at the family at large the night before... 'I won't be long I'll be back soon,' that was the end of it until it was two years past before I saw them again.²

The experience of Lance Rogers and his brother are fairly typical of the majority of single men who volunteered for Spain and of their families. Prospective Brigaders were instructed by the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) to leave for Spain without informing their relatives. The need for secrecy being paramount, particularly after the reintroduction of the Foreign Enlistment Act (1870) in February 1937 by the Non-Intervention Committee. This made volunteering illegal. Garry MacCartney described the situation to his brother,

And I took the letter up to my brother Andy...I said, 'Andy, give this to mother...I'm going to Spain. Don't tell anyone because if I'm caught leaving the country there is the question of a jail sentence under the Foreign Enlistment Act.'³

¹ Interview with Rhodri, 4 February 1999.

² Interview with Lance Rogers, AUD248, South Wales Coalfield Collection (SWCC), Swansea.

³ MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, 1986, p.242.

There was also the possibility that if families found out it could endanger the Party's organisational work in recruiting men. Such an occurrence very nearly happened when a father found out about his son's attempt to volunteer; their MP was informed and a scandal blew up in the press. The CPGB Secretariat was greatly concerned by the allegation that the International Brigade Wounded and Dependents' Aid Society (DAC), an organisation set up to financially assist relatives and wounded volunteers, was being used to recruit men.⁴

Once it is established that we have misused the names of prominent political personalities we will find all our united front work jeopardised.⁵

This incident was an unfortunate exception. The majority of relatives dealt with their concerns within the family. One hopeful volunteer was waylaid by his fiancée because they were shortly to be married.⁶ Another, John Dunlop, who confided in a work colleague, was nearly stopped by his family at Edinburgh station after his boss had found out and informed them.⁷

Secrecy in compliance with the Communist Party's wishes was an important element in the rationale of volunteers not telling their parents or siblings but interviews with veterans show that the compulsion to go to Spain was very strong and they thought that confiding in family would hinder their passage. Bernard McKenna explained that the desire to go to Spain was stronger than any feelings of guilt at not informing his parents.⁸ Albert Charlesworth didn't tell his mother because "I thought she might stop me because I was only 19 at the time."⁹ Some realized that it would be too difficult to explain, that their parents would never understand, and so just left. Thus there were a variety of combinations why the volunteers left in secrecy both practical (party loyalty) and emotional (the compulsion to go).

⁴ 'The Boy who went to Spain,' *News Chronicle*, 28 July 1938.

⁵ Open letter from CPGB Secretariat, 1 August 1938, Box C – 24/1, MML.

⁶ Francis, *History Workshop Journal*, No 32, 1991, p.74.

⁷ MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, 1986, p.118.

⁸ Interview with Bernard McKenna, 15 April 1998.

⁹ Interview with Albert Charlesworth, 798/04, IWM, 1976.

Once safely in Spain many volunteers were eager to make amends to hastily left family. There is much evidence in letters written home that they felt a considerable amount of guilt and concern at having left loved ones in such a hurried and secretive manner. Joseph Lees of Oldham wrote to his friend, "with it being such a rush didn't make it right about mother. So I hope you will get it seen to."¹⁰ He wrote again later on, "...also tell my mother I write every week to her without fail."¹¹ Bill Coles wrote from Spain after a brief goodbye that he was sorry to leave like he did.¹²

Some volunteers believed it would be better for relatives to know more quickly of their departure and so entrusted friends, mostly political, to tell parents and siblings. This was usually someone who knew the family. A girl Susie's brother was fond of broke the news to her.

Sally her name was, she was a local girl and I was friendly with her.
She came out one night [a couple of days after he had left] I said,
'Have you seen M?' ...' [she replied] 'I've got a message for you.
He's gone to Spain.' 'Where?' 'He's joined up...' ¹³

It was left to John Tunnah's friends to tell his mother that he had not accompanied them back home from a cycling holiday in France because he had joined the International Brigade.¹⁴ One wife simply wrote, "He just went away one night. I found out the following day from his friend that he had gone to Spain to fight fascism."¹⁵

Others were informed by the political organisations that had arranged their departure.

Apparently arrangements had been made to inform the relatives of the eight volunteers that went from Merthyr Tydfil, after noon on the day of departure, by which time I assume it would be too late to contact them to persuade them to change their minds.¹⁶

¹⁰ Joseph Lees to Friends Les and Eve, not dated, F67 Box 12, Working – Class Movement Library (WCML), Salford.

¹¹ Joseph Lees to Les and Eve, not dated, Box 12, F67, WCML.

¹² 'The Little Bolshie Who Broke his Mother's Heart,' *South Wales Echo*, 18 July 1996.

¹³ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

¹⁴ Interview with John Tunnah, 840/9, IWM.

¹⁵ Questionnaire IIq, question 8.

¹⁶ Questionnaire of Rhodri, question 8.

A mother found out from Labour Club members the day before her son left but did not prevent him from leaving.¹⁷ The effect their departure had on the family was quite often profound. Not merely because they had gone to fight but due to the manner in which they had left.

It was devastating because he didn't have the courage to tell me.¹⁸

In many respects the shock felt, particularly by mothers, justified the secrecy of volunteers. Bill Cole's parents were heartbroken and John Tunnah's mother wept everyday he was away.¹⁹

It was no easier for families who were told before their relative left for Spain. Volunteers in most instances felt compelled to tell their spouses especially when they had children.²⁰ The reactions of those who were told, although all are unique, clearly fall into two types of response; the supportive but nonetheless concerned and those so completely set against it that they tried to prevent them from leaving. The latter were often wives with children, concerned not only for their husband's well-being but how they would cope on their own both financially and emotionally. Leo Price, a Welsh volunteer, had great problems leaving his wife Lil and child, Rita. He informed her of his intentions a week before he was due to leave. "Oh you're not going, you won't go," she said, I said, 'I'm going'" Such was her objection he had to sneak out in the middle of the night and stop with his sister, who was politically minded. Yet Lil came looking for him, "I thought, 'oh hell, I don't know where it is, I'm bloody determined to go.'" ²¹ Although Leo emphasised the strength of his convictions in his determination to leave in spite of Lil's obvious objections, his letters home show much concern for the emotional well being of his wife and child. He wrote to his sister, "Rita is pining for me so Lil says. I had not reckoned on that

¹⁷ Interview with Albert Charlesworth, 798/4, IWM.

¹⁸ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

¹⁹ Interview with John Tunnah, 840/9, IWM.

²⁰ A rare exception was Harry Stratton who told his wife he had a job in Southampton. At the time she was pregnant and they had two young children. Not surprisingly he did not receive a response to his letters the whole time he was in Spain. Stratton's memoir, *To Anti-Fascism by Taxi*, 1984, pp. 28 & 41.

²¹ Interview with Leo Price, AUD/384, SWCC.

when I left and I am worried.”²² Dora remembers her mum, who was not a member of any political party before her husband volunteered, sitting on the edge of the bed crying when he told her he was leaving.²³ Later she remonstrated with him at Victoria Station as he was departing.²⁴ The father of George Leeson nearly succeeded in preventing him from going to Spain. He delayed his son for a few weeks with the following chilling words.

I always remember one of the things my father said was, ‘You know you’re absolutely wrong in going there... You’ll get killed anyway. None of you will ever come back alive.’²⁵

Not all apolitical relatives went to such extremes as this. Mrs Syd Booth said her husband “kept mythering [her] to go,” until she gave in. Forty years later she did not regret her decision to let him go but recalling the night she saw him off still reduced her to tears.²⁶

It was not any easier for politically active relatives or members of the Communist Party. It did however help if there was an understanding of the issues involved. Frank and Charlotte Owen, both members of the Communist Party, took the decision he should leave together. This did not stop her enquiring when he would be returning home.

You ask when I am coming home, I cannot say as no one knows, but please do not worry as I have told you before, there is no need for it.²⁷

Rose Kerrigan, an active member of the Communist Party, was seven months pregnant when her husband Peter, prominent in the Scottish Party, asked if he could go to Spain.

²² Letter from Leo Price to sister Flo, not dated, SC 309, SWCC.

²³ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

²⁴ *The New Worker*, 17 May 1996.

²⁵ Interview with George Leeson, 830/4, IWM.

²⁶ Interview with Mary Freeman, 842/2, IWM.

²⁷ Letter from Frank Owen to his wife Charlotte, 2 July 1937, SC156, SWCC. This was Frank’s last known letter home.

As I always backed my husband up in most things he'd done
I never made any marvel about it.²⁸

Although these women were aware of why their husbands had decided to volunteer, their own personal situations, both were pregnant and with young children to support, meant that their political understanding was tempered with concern and irritation, as well as an acknowledgment that it was a necessity. It was more easily borne by politically aware siblings, for example, those not so reliant financially or emotionally on the volunteer.

My elder brother was very supportive...He was really the only
other member of our family to be politically aware, and thus
with understanding of what motivated me.²⁹

Olive Wilson, the sister of a Welsh volunteer, explained that although concerned for her brother's safety as a politically active family, "...we understood why he was going."³⁰ Finally *Lance Rogers recalls how his family who throughout their lives* had, "been committed to the labour movement," were "pillars of strength" and "sustained" him in his struggles.³¹

Drawing conclusions about the families' place in the leave-taking of volunteers is not necessarily problematic in spite of the many and varied situations and responses. Obviously relatives with political knowledge were better at understanding than the apolitical but they still had their fears and concerns. This suggests that for the majority, family issues had at least equal footing with the public political sphere. Likewise volunteers were more inclined to confide their secret to a politically aware relative but even more persuasive in this was marital status and dependants.³² Many veterans could not leave their children without saying goodbye.

²⁸ Interview with Rose Kerrigan, 796/1, IWM.

²⁹ Personal letter from Fred Thomas, 26 March 1999.

³⁰ Interview with Olive Wilson, AUD/442, SWCC.

³¹ Interview with Lance Rogers, AUD/248, SWCC.

³² Of the married men who successfully got to Spain seventeen records were found. Ten of these were examined and of these cases nine told their spouses they were leaving for Spain. Information from Imperial War Museum catalogue and IB Roll of Honour.

But when the day came that I was going I took my daughter to bed and that was the hardest thing that ever I did.³³

Family were not uppermost in the minds of many (mainly) single men when they decided to volunteer. They were of course a major consideration for men with their own families. Some like Peter Kerrigan would have listened to their wives if they had expressed a desire for them to stay but others like Harry Stratton were not prepared to take that risk. Overwhelmingly, once they had decided to go it was almost impossible for family to stop them. Once in Spain their letters suggest family well-being was among the most important aspects of their service.

Whilst You Were Away

In considering the period whilst Brigaders were in Spain relatives were not merely passive in their response to the situation they were left in. As the next section will discuss, although families had to support themselves alone and were devastated both emotionally and financially by the loss of a family member, the majority responded assertively. Some relatives were converted to politics, usually the Communist Party and supported the Republican cause at home. They also contributed to the upkeep of the morale of volunteers by sending letters of support, cigarettes and food. More than any other contributory factor families made it possible for married volunteers to go, by supporting and looking after their homes and children. However, this was the most difficult and demanding period for the relatives. The main concern for most parents, particularly mothers, was the safe return of their children. Wives with dependants were faced with the additional worry of how to support themselves without state assistance. The fact that so many affected families were able to do this, aside from individual ingenuity, was partly due to supportive extended family, usually relatives of the volunteers, and secondly through the combined efforts of; the labour movement, working class communities, the Communist Party, the co-operative movement and some trade unions. Their contributions were not always uniform and were often sporadically administered but the responsibility to the families was felt even though their main concern and priority was to aid the Spanish

³³ Interview with Leo Price, AUD/384, SWCC.

Republic, in terms of the volunteers, Spanish refugees and food for Spain. An Association had been set up to assist financially the dependants of men in Spain but it also had to weigh up the demands of wounded men, who it has been shown were given priority over the relatives. Family and community networks were additionally an important means of emotional support. However, they also had the potential to make life even more difficult.

Role of Extended Family and Community

The extended family in various ways often gave invaluable help to the immediate relatives of volunteers. These could be, for instance the aunts, uncles or siblings who no longer lived at the home of the Brigader. There are numerous examples of both emotional and financial support, the latter most usually food. Dora remembered her mother's brother who was a butcher supplying the family with a piece of meat every time he visited. However, significantly most of the instances of help came from blood relatives of the volunteer. The aunt of Edgar Wilkinson wrote to the Communist Party to enquire as to his whereabouts on behalf of her sister (his mother) who had become ill with worry.³⁴ Jim Strangward's father wrote of Jim's sister, "Eirwen handed in notice to look after us."³⁵ In fact the practice of younger female relatives giving up work to live in and carry out domestic duties for male members of the family was fairly common practise in a working-class household without a mother,

The expectation that a sister should be available to look after brothers as well as elderly parents seems to have been common.³⁶

³⁴ Letter to Secretariat, not dated, Harry Pollitt's Papers, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, National Labour History Museum (NLHM), Manchester.

³⁵ Letter to Jim Strangward from his father, not dated, SC691, SWCC.

³⁶ J. Lewis, (ed.) *Labour and Love: Woman's Experiences of Home and Family, 1850-1940*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p.261. This was not the only example, Benny Goldman spoke of his sister having to look after the his family after his mother had died. Informal talk with Benny Goldman, June 1998. Fred Thomas spoke of the fortitude of his sister placed with the responsibility of looking after them all due to their mother's incapacity. Letter dated 26 March 1999.

Yet the few Strangward family letters suggest that Eirwen's full-time care was needed not only domestically but emotionally as well. Correspondence to Jim from his father and brother Ivor, as well as Eirwen, show that they missed him deeply.

I wish you was coming as well for to see your face³⁷

I wish you were home as it doesn't seem like home
to me with you not here³⁸

The family appeared to be drawing closer together in order to cope with his absence. Another volunteer, Leo Price, wrote to his sister begging her to help after he'd heard from his wife that they were not coping well without him.

In a previous letter I have written asking you to see her
and try and console her and my Baby as they are both
considerably worried over me.³⁹

Giving support was not entirely left to women, although they were usually given the responsibility over domestic and emotional matters. Male members of the extended family, like Dora's uncle, also contributed. George Green's father visited his grandchildren whilst they were at Summerhill School and had them within his care when their mother Nan went to Spain as a medical administrator.⁴⁰

However, extended families were not always so understanding and supportive. Often the family of the volunteer's wife were the angriest, feeling that their kin had been deserted. This sometimes prompted the offer to give up the marital home and reside with them. Mrs Syd Booth described how her biggest problem was fighting with her sisters.

They were always having a go at you...give the house up
and come and live with me.⁴¹

³⁷ Letter from Jim's Father, not dated, SC691, SWCC. Jim was killed on the Ebro in August 1938.

³⁸ From Eirwen, not dated, SC691, SWCC.

³⁹ Letter from Leo Price to sister Flo, not dated, SC309, SWCC.

⁴⁰ Interview with Martin Green, 1999.

⁴¹ Interview with Mary Freeman, 842/2, IWM.

The severest problems were caused within Catholic families. Bernard recalls his brother's initial animosity when he returned from Spain, "he didn't want to know me." His cousins he remembers "...wouldn't have had me over the door."⁴² However, Catholic communities in Ireland lacked any understanding or sympathy with the family of Irish Brigaders, who in their eyes were in league with the desecrators of the Spanish church. This is epitomized by the experience of a mother who received a telegram to say her son had been injured in Spain. When the postman handed it to her he said, 'A pity he wasn't killed.'⁴³

The attitudes of neighbours could also be disturbing and unsettling for the women left on their own with young children. The experience of others' cruelty deeply affected some of the wives. Charlotte Owen was so upset by people talking behind her back, 'fancy him going out there with two children and another on the way,' that she wrote to her husband.⁴⁴ Neighbours' scorn could also be alienating, Mrs Syd Booth felt she could neither talk to her family nor the neighbours, "[they] didn't understand, thought he'd deserted [me]."⁴⁵

A veteran's brother was all too aware of the negative response even in working-class communities, "most people would say, 'well what does he want out there? It's a civil war, let them get on with it.' They just hadn't stopped to think or reason why the civil war was on." Yet he goes on to say, "*but those who were conscious of course would stick together.*"⁴⁶ He had the job of visiting the families of the eight men who had volunteered from his town. Every time a letter was received he cycled round to let them know all was well. Despite the negative attitudes encountered by a few women there was a groundswell of support for the Spanish Republic in working-class communities.

The movement embraced people of all classes...But the working-class involvement was outstanding... and flow[ed] in more generously from working-class streets than from others.⁴⁷

⁴² Interview with Bernard McKenna, 15 April 1998.

⁴³ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

⁴⁴ Interview with Harold, 30 March 1999.

⁴⁵ Interview with Mary Freeman, 842/2, IWM.

⁴⁶ Interview with Rhodri, 4 February 1999.

⁴⁷ Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, 1986, p.22.

Many people in poor areas with high unemployment donated food or bought milk tokens when they could ill afford it. For example Hackney, a working-class district in the east end of London, collected food, money and sent an ambulance to Spain.⁴⁸ In Tonypany, a highly politicised town in the Rhondda valley, £60 and two tons of foodstuff were collected in a two-week period.⁴⁹ So within all communities and families there was a balance between hostility and support for the volunteers that their relatives had to cope with. Could a distinction have been made by certain people between supporting the Republican cause and disapproving of men who had left their families to fight? Were the people who talked behind Charlotte Owen's back in Mardy the same ones who bought milk tokens or donated tins of food? Public priorities were often placed above private ones in the examination of the family and this conflict. Unfortunately it would be virtually impossible to prove that it occurred in this way.

The Importance of Letters

The letters that passed between volunteers and their family and friends were important in two ways. Firstly, in terms of personal morale on both sides. Letters were the only form of communication between families and so were integral to feeling close to a loved one who was far away and in possible danger.⁵⁰ A letter brought news that they were still alive. It illustrated a part of their life that the recipient could envisage. It brought moments of happiness.

I know he wrote because I remember Mam's joy at
receiving letters.⁵¹

Frank Owen wrote both erotically, "I am writing this in a bath of sweat and stripped to the waist..."⁵² and evocatively, "In conclusion tell the children they shall come out here one day, where the oranges, cherries, pears, peaches, figs and apples and grapes

⁴⁸ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

⁴⁹ Francis, *Miners Against Fascism*, 1982, p.119.

⁵⁰ Sam Morris always began his letters to his parents, "Just to let you know I am in the best of health." SC831, SWCC.

⁵¹ Interview with Gwyn, 11 August 1999.

⁵² Frank Owen to Charlotte, not dated, SC156, SWCC.

grow in profusion, I am of the opinion that if you came to Spain you would never want to leave.”⁵³

Unfortunately there remains a disproportionately small number of letters written by the relatives compared with those of veterans. Correspondence from family contained more personal details and brought welcome news to Brigaders of their well being, the everyday routines and of how children were keeping. Relatives also sent cigarettes in their letters as necessary for most volunteers as warm clothing and food. Albert Charlesworth wrote to his mother, “I shall close now so don’t forget the cigs, as early as possible.”⁵⁴ Family were all too aware of the importance of keeping spirits up by sending cigarettes. Jim Strangward’s father was very upset because he was only able to send his son a few.

But I must tell you that you are ever in our mind.
The worst of it is we cannot send much cigs in the
letter.⁵⁵

The receipt of a letter must have brought great relief to front weary volunteers becoming a vital link with home and normality.⁵⁶ One has only to note Sid Silver’s envy that Benny Goldman should receive ten letters to his one or how unmarried sons wrote regularly to their mothers.

Although their contents often discussed personal matters a few letters refer to the war in Spain. These were sent to family members and especially friends who had been highly supportive of the volunteers’ decision to go or were themselves politically conscious or active. They boosted morale in a different way by using heroic fighting talk and letting the volunteers know that the cause was also being supported at home. It was the Brigaders’ letters home that were more concerned with the political message than those they received. This forms the second use for letters - as propaganda. Not necessarily to spread the word but to reinforce among those who

⁵³ Frank Owen to Charlotte, 22 June 1937, SC156, SWCC.

⁵⁴ Letter from Albert Charlesworth to his mother, 9 October 1937, Box 12, F67, WCML.

⁵⁵ Letter to Jim Strangward from his father, not dated, SC691, SWCC.

⁵⁶ “I have just received your letters and cigs and papers and very welcome indeed. It is like a bit of home to receive news and so on,” wrote Joseph Lees to his friends. 4 April 1937, Box 12, F67, WCML.

were sympathetic and to share the fruition of their political journey. Numerous examples show men sharing political slogans with friends yet making no mention of the reasons they were out there to their family.⁵⁷

Volunteers could however influence apolitical members of their family. Susie spoke of how it was her brother's letters from Spain that made her politically active.⁵⁸ Brigaders knew though that it was no use attempting to make a conversion to extreme left-wing politics when all some relatives wanted to hear was that their sons or husbands were safe and well. It is an examination of the few letters written by family and existing in public archives that best illustrates the emotional trauma experienced by close relatives, mothers, wives and children at being separated.

Those relatives who were apolitical and thus less likely to understand the volunteers' reason for risking their life felt the absence most keenly. A common question involved asking why their loved ones wanted to fight in another country's war. Parents had memories of the Great War and so nightmarish images of fighting and slaughter synonymous with the First World War overrode understanding of the political nature of the conflict. One mother had consulted a spiritualist for reassurance as to her son's well being. The most extreme case was that of John Tunnah who described how his mother sent him two tear-stained letters a day.⁵⁹

For children the miscomprehension must have been equally as bewildering as to apolitical relatives. Owen's mother told her three children that their father was going to fight men who were not very nice and imprisoning people.⁶⁰ Now they are still unsure as to whether he was right to go. Lil Price wrote to her husband telling him that their daughter Rita was pining for him. In an interview forty years later Rita remembered how in a family of three he was missed terribly.⁶¹ May Edwards wrote to her husband almost every day, despite almost single-handedly running the family

⁵⁷ Regarding a request for the letters of Tom Howell Jones. "There is only one. His brother tells me most of his letters were short and simply enquiries about the members of his family especially his mother" and niece. Tom's letters regarding the struggle in Spain were written to his friend Arthur Probert. To Islwyn Nicholas from May Thomas, 8 June 1944, SC183d, SWCC.

⁵⁸ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1999.

⁵⁹ Interview with John Tunnah, 840/9, IWM.

⁶⁰ Interview with Owen, 18 August 1999.

⁶¹ Interview with Rita Rees, AUD/386, SWCC.

shop and looking after their baby son. Her letters are deeply personal and describe movingly the distress felt by their child,

You'd be really surprised to hear Don almost every night
and morning, 'where's my Daddy? I want my daddy.'⁶²

I read your latest letter to him and when I read out your
last phrase 'and a kiss for the wee son' – he started to
weep – it's really hard to believe isn't it? – but he wept
until I wept.⁶³

These reactions demonstrate the incredible sacrifice of the volunteers, particularly those who were married and left their families. Although some outsiders believed they were irresponsible it must have taken extra courage and determination when leaving their children. The forbearance of the families when left with the financial and emotional burden of coping alone must not be forgotten. This lot almost exclusively fell to the women of the family. It was a task many of them still found difficult although some were considered the 'head of the household.'⁶⁴ Rita Rees recalls how her mother, who she described as a 'coper,' cried often, "my mother was lonely...she'd get very upset, *she missed him very, very badly.*"⁶⁵

Women did not exclusively remain at home and care for the family whilst their men were fighting. Over forty women from Britain volunteered as medical staff and administrators. The majority of them were single when they went to Spain but a very small number of married women with children who were from middle-class backgrounds also volunteered. With the help of Wogan Phillips⁶⁶ Nan Green, an active member of the Communist Party could join her husband in Spain. Her son explained,

⁶² Letter from May Edwards to Bob Edwards, 19 January 1937, Bob Edwards Papers, Box 5, NLHM.

⁶³ May Edwards to Bob Edwards, 8 February 1937, Bob Edwards Papers, Box 5, NLHM.

⁶⁴ Owen described his mother as such – "my mother was the matriarch." Interview, 18 August 1999.

⁶⁵ Interview with Rita Rees, AUD/386, SWCC.

⁶⁶ Wogan Phillips was the first Communist to sit in the House of Lords.

She said that she had two small children and he said he'd pay for them to go to boarding school...she'd read about Neill's Summerhill somewhere and she thought that would be a good place for us to go.⁶⁷

Molly Murphy who volunteered as a nurse had a fourteen-year-old son, Gordon, who attended another boarding school Bedales in Hampshire. His father, J. T. Murphy, a leading member of the left-wing Labour Party grouping, the Socialist League remained at home.⁶⁸ Women from working-class backgrounds found it more difficult. The single working-class women found it relatively easy to go to Spain but it was impossible for married working-class women with children. Susie told me that she had wanted to volunteer after becoming involved in collecting aid to Spain but found it out of the question because she had a young child.⁶⁹ Within the context of the Spanish Civil War and volunteering the parental responsibility of emotionally and financially supporting the family became the practical and assumed task of women.

Men undoubtedly also suffered terribly in Spain, in front-line conditions, from extremes of weather, lack of food and heavy bombardment. Women working in hospitals often positioned at the front experienced similar hardships. However, having compared the letters and testimonies of family with those of volunteers the experiences of relatives were in the short-term as traumatic as the volunteers' experiences were to them.

It means so much to me during these seemingly endless days to have direct contact with you...⁷⁰ I love you and want you more than ever before to come back safely...⁷¹

He is down on your list as wounded and I have written to his mother to say he is alive and well as she must not have shocks, according to doctors she is

⁶⁷ Interview with Martin Green, June 1999.

⁶⁸ Fyrth, *The Signal Was Spain*, 1986, p. 70.

⁶⁹ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

⁷⁰ Letter from May Edwards, 19 January 1937, Bob Edwards Papers, Box 5, NLHM.

⁷¹ Letter from May Edwards, 15 February 1937, Bob Edwards papers, Box 5, NLHM.

in a very critical state that would be fatal most likely.⁷²

The emotional strain of worrying about the safety of a loved one, how to cope financially, especially when alone with children, dealing with pressures from unsympathetic extended family or neighbours, constantly waiting on letters as the only form of contact took its toll. When the ordeal was over, one way or another, either with their return or news of their death, a new set of challenges presented themselves.

The Return of the Hero

On 7th December 1938, the majority of the remaining British Battalion arrived home at Victoria Station in London. The crowds of relatives, supporters and labour movement personalities "...filled the whole station and lined the surrounding streets."⁷³ It was these eagerly awaiting throngs that legitimised the volunteers' action in Spain by giving the men what many have described as a hero's welcome. Fred Thomas wrote of the arrival, "[i]n Victoria Station, in darkness, thousands packed the surrounding streets to greet us and to recognise relative or friend among the dishevelled and unshaven men, markedly unburdened with luggage after our long absence. In unusual and soon-to-be disowned unity, Communist Party chiefs, Harry Pollitt and Willie Gallagher stood side by side with Sir Stafford Cripps and Clement Atlee. Some speeches, some cheering, and we dispersed."⁷⁴ The feting of the Brigaders continued all over the country as they returned to their hometowns. Parties, public meetings, civic receptions and memorial meetings were held to honour returning volunteers.

I came home to Kirkcaldy and there was a welcome
home held in the Adam Smith Hall...where various
people spoke and welcomed me home.⁷⁵

⁷² K. Wilkinson to Communist Party HQ, postmarked 12 April 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NLHM.

⁷³ Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.241.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *To Tilt at Windmills*, 1996, p.169-170.

⁷⁵ MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, 1986, p.55.



Well-dressed relatives ecstatically greet their returning heroes.⁷⁶

(Imperial War Museum)

⁷⁶ 'International Brigade men greeting relatives at Victoria Station on their return from Spain in 1938, Imperial War Museum, Spanish Civil War Photograph Collection, HU 34736.

The South Wales Miners' Federation laid on a meal and reception for the Welsh at the Grand Hotel in Cardiff. Morien Morgan arriving back later than expected missed his welcome home party, a brass band waiting at the railway station.⁷⁷ Gwyn explained that there was 'tremendous excitement' down the Welsh valleys when his father returned.

A great, great day. Tremendous. He was brown. He was thin...He wore his beret.⁷⁸

A large memorial gathering was held at the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre in January 1939 honouring both the fallen and the people who had returned. Family and friends, who could afford to travel to London along with prominent people from the labour movement joined the ex-Brigaders. The Earl's Court memorial gathering was the epitome of the public feeling felt towards the volunteers on their return.

The very public expression of euphoria, particularly in elevating the fallen of the conflict hid both the private pain of the families and some veterans discomfort at the heroic status that public and labour movement adulation had given them.

I felt rather embarrassed at the sort of respect and adulation that many of us received from enthusiasts because after all we'd only done what millions of people had done before the war.⁷⁹

In contrast to the labour movement's idolatry veterans had to face the grief of relatives who had lost a loved one in Spain. On their return some had the unenviable task of relating how men had died at best a difficult task considering the terrible way that many Brigaders had met their ends. The confusion of the battles made exact details such as time or even date of death hazy or unknown and the hasty burials of comrades, if they were lucky, made the task of filling in missing information for the relatives uncomfortable and painful. The majority of elegies were a series of

⁷⁷ *South Wales Echo*, 18 July 1996.

⁷⁸ Interview with Gwyn, 11 August 1999.

⁷⁹ MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, 1986, p.168.

euphemisms, half-truths and lies. Walter Gregory wrote in his memoir of the guilt he felt at lying to the parents of a fallen comrade.

'Did Bernard have a nice coffin? Were there flowers on the grave? What was the headstone like? Who conducted the service?...I had not been prepared for questions such as these. Bernard had been buried at the height of a ferocious battle...I could not bring myself to tell the poor, grieving woman the realities of life in action and invented for her solace a truly memorable funeral. Pity, embarrassment and guilt combined to make that evening a terrible one...'⁸⁰

A Scottish veteran remembers very clearly explaining the circumstances of death to the brother of a fallen comrade. The recollections of other aspects of his homecoming are vague suggesting their encounter was a memorable aspect of his return. His testimony shows similarities with Gregory's - the desire to protect and also the embarrassment.

I didn't wish to explain all the circumstances of how Ben died. So I was as short as possible in my answers and decided not to explain too harrowing experiences to his brother.'⁸¹

However there are exceptions where details could be furnished and some volunteers saw it as their duty to inform relatives of the death of a close comrade particularly when they knew the family. Edwin Greening wrote a moving, eloquent but frank elegy for his best friend Tom Howell Jones, which he sent to Jones' brother. The letter deserves extensive quotation because it demonstrates several important features. Although Greening does not spare the circumstances and the extent of Jones' injuries, his death and funeral are given a romantic almost mythical quality through idealised and romanticised language. He died in his comrade's arms, buried by his closest friends in a typically Spanish landscape and kept company forever by soldiers both 'Spanish and English' who died fighting for freedom.

⁸⁰ Gregory, *The Shallow Grave*, 1986, p.155.

⁸¹ MacDougall, *Voices from the Spanish Civil War*, 1986, p.235.

My dear Dai Mark, I regret to write this but Tom Howell was killed a few days ago (at 2:30p.m. August 25, 1938 to be exact)...[he was] very badly wounded about the chest, neck and head and he was already unconscious and passing away...Tom was from the moment he was hit, beyond human aid and all we could do was raise him up a little and in two or three minutes, with his head resting on my knee, Tom passed away without gaining consciousness...That night Alun Williams...and Lance Rogers of Merthyr, one of Tom's pals, carried his corpse to the little valley below, where he was to rest forever. And there on that great mountain range, in a little grove of almond trees, we laid Tom Howell to rest...but he is not alone there, all around him lie the graves of many Spanish and English boys...If fifty years pass I shall not forget.⁸²

The encounters with relatives made a deep and lasting impression on the veterans. Greening did not forget the death of his friend and when interviewed forty years later, for Hywel Francis' South Wales Coalfield Collection, he gave exactly the same description of Tom Howell's death, without embellishment. However, a very different account was given on *The Colliers' Crusade* for Welsh Television. Greening is not so precise about the date of Tom Howell's death, he gives 24th August, whereas to Tom's brother he gives the exact time and date. He goes on in the television interview to say, "they came and said, 'quick your mate's had it,' and I ran there and Tom Howell Jones and his mates had been killed instantly."⁸³ This is a very different account to the letter making it difficult to ascertain the correct version but of greater interest is the situation in which each statement was given. Greening writes eloquently to Tom's relatives, giving him a peaceful and dignified end, with a moving funeral. He satisfies all of the needs of the bereaved relatives wishing to know detailed facts about their kin's death. In a one-to-one interview Greening gives the same sensitive account. Perhaps he had produced the letter, for the archive, at the same time he was interviewed and so could hardly tell a different story. On the television he may have felt the need to brutalise or simplify the experience for a larger audience believing this version to fit in more with a programme detailing martial exploits. His build up to Tom Howell's death describes a particularly

⁸² Letter from Edwin Greening to Dai Mark Jones, 28 August 1938, SC183a, SWCC.

⁸³ Edwin Greening on *The Colliers' Crusade*, Episode Four, BBC Wales, 1979.

ferocious attack, which he described as a 'slaughter-house.' His eloquent description may have seemed out of place in that context.

Another veteran stated that he "always had difficulty being intimate" with the families of fallen friends aware of an understandable barrier between them because he had returned and they had not. He articulates this in a letter written recently, over sixty years after the War.

No there were too many unanswerable questions for poor ____'s mother for her to become reconciled to the terrible finality of the death in a foreign country of her flesh and blood, only just starting to yield to her the pride and sense of possession she saw in her creation. I never forgot Mrs ____ although I never met her.⁸⁴

In spite of the passing years relatives understandably remained concerned to hear how their loved ones had met their fate. A letter from a local Communist Party branch to International Brigade headquarters in London dated 22nd November 1945 articulated the anxiety caused by not knowing.

The relatives of P. Durkin...are still unsettled about the fate of this comrade...they would like to trace someone who actually knew Durkin and who had been with him when he was killed.⁸⁵

The repercussions of a death in Spain, particularly where the circumstances were unknown, affected subsequent generations and even those not related to the volunteer. Ray told the extraordinary story of how the relatives of his grandfather's close comrade, killed in Spain, traced him and visited him to hear the full details of his death. Nearly fifty years after his death Dickie Bird's family were watching *The Colliers' Crusade* and heard a comrade talking about his death at Brunete. They immediately traced Ray through the BBC and visited him to hear the full story. What is particularly revealing is how Ray had hoped to 'connect' with Dickie Bird's

⁸⁴ Letter from Lance Rogers, 14 February 1999.

⁸⁵ Letter from Teeside Communist Party branch to International Brigade HQ, dated 22 November 1945, Box 41, A/35, MML.

family. Instead, Dickie's family completed the other side to his grandfather's uplifting tale of comradeship that had influenced Ray so much. How he had left his pay packet on the table and just disappeared never to return. That his mother had never forgiven him for going to Spain and how the family had been haunted about the exact circumstances of his death for almost fifty years. Ray described that once they knew they wanted no further association with the civil war. "As far as they were concerned, they'd lost a brother, their mother's life had been ruined by Dickie's volunteering. They'd found out the circumstances of his death and of course it had been laid to rest."⁸⁶ Similarly the family of George Fretwell, killed at Jarama, had to wait until 1970 before they knew more details about his death. A fellow Brigader was able to tell them how he had met his death and exactly where. Following a newspaper article some months later another Brigader came forward to tell the family that he had been in the burial party.⁸⁷

The upsurge of popular feeling on the return of the British Battalion also omits the men who were left behind in Spain and their families. Walter Gregory had been made a prisoner in Franco's jails and was not released until March 1939. He missed out on the rapturous welcome that had greeted the main contingent on their return home. He put it down to the fact that by the time he arrived back in Britain people were preparing for another war.⁸⁸ Frank West had also been taken prisoner in September 1938 just before the Brigade was pulled out of Spain. His wife and daughter did not know of his incarceration and so expected he would be home with the main contingent at Victoria Station in December 1938. A further six months went by before he was released.⁸⁹

When the men eventually arrived home some were so physically changed that family hardly recognised them. Bill Alexander alludes to this in his description of the homecoming.

⁸⁶ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

⁸⁷ Information from *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.67.

⁸⁸ Gregory, *The Shallow Grave*, 1986, p.154.

⁸⁹ Interview with his daughter. Name suppressed to protect anonymity.

Wives and children met their men some so thin and changed that recognition was not immediate.⁹⁰

Rita Rees experienced something similar. The day her father returned stayed in her mind. "I hadn't a clue who he was but of course he was so brown, he'd been wounded and he'd lost weight. He looked pretty fit but I didn't know him straight away."⁹¹ It was as if some relatives imagined the Brigaders would return physically unchanged and so were unprepared for the difference in their appearance. The first thing Mrs Syd Booth noticed about the long anticipated arrival of her husband was that he hadn't had a shave.⁹² This should not detract from the great relief and gratitude felt by most relatives on the safe return of the volunteers. They may have been changed men but they had come home. Rita Rees explained that her mother would forgive her father anything, as long as he returned home. Could this forgiveness and understanding be extended to men who never came home?

Understanding their Loss

The image of the just war has an uncomfortable side that historians have been slow to acknowledge. The overwhelming impression from letters and testimonies was incomprehension at why their children and husbands had died and thus a rejection of the ideals they had fought for. A few lashed out at what they saw as the cause of their misery – the Communist Party. The parents of Syd Hamm tried to break up their son's memorial service, where various political dignitaries were due to speak.⁹³ One of Syd's comrades in Spain wrote, "I tried to see them [Syd's family] all those years ago, for I was a friend and with him when he was killed...I soon learned I'd be intruding, for the family was hostile to any remembrance of him by the Communist Party and the wider labour movement."⁹⁴ The attempt of his family to make sense of his death involved the process of rejecting public expressions of grief, which invariably meant acquiescence with the labour movement's deification of the fallen. Similarly Susie's mother found the only outlet for her grief was to attack those she

⁹⁰ Alexander, *British Volunteers for Liberty*, 1982, p.241.

⁹¹ Interview with Rita Rees, AUD/386, SWCC.

⁹² Interview with Mary Freeman, 842/2, IWM.

⁹³ Stradling, (ed.) *Brother Against Brother*, 1998, p.14.

⁹⁴ Private letter from Lance Rogers, 7 February 1999.

held responsible. She tackled Mrs Lesser, a Communist Party activist with two sons in Spain, who owned the local grocer's shop. Mrs Lesser responded by saying 'you should be proud,' "and my mother wiped all the counter, the eggs, the milk everything."⁹⁵ Much of the anguish and resentment was caused by the manner in which relatives heard about deaths.

Outsiders knew about Frank's death before his own family and intimate friends...we had to tell Mrs Whitehead that Frank was dead even whilst we had nothing officially from your organisation⁹⁶

A few had to wait many months for official confirmation. Fred White was killed in July 1937, but his wife did not receive the death certificate until March 1939. George Fretwell's family had to wait over a year to be informed that he was 'missing, believed killed.'⁹⁷ In their defence the Communist Party wished to be one hundred per cent sure that the right information was given out after a few false reports of death. They were also working with the notoriously slow Spanish authorities.

The absence of a focus for mourning also caused distress. In common with other wars the bodies of men killed in the conflict could not be brought home. The state had sponsored the erection of memorial stones for the Great War dead which provided not only a place of public remembrance but could also be used for private grief. The tomb of the 'Unknown Soldier' was the most symbolic because the bereaved could believe that it might be their relative. Civil war memorials did not appear until fifty years later by which time parents, the largest number of bereaved, were all dead. Quite a few families made enquiries about having bodies brought home,⁹⁸ again as a focus for their mourning. The Cole family from near Cardiff "tried in vain" to have their son's body returned home.⁹⁹ Susie's mother continually asked her to find out where her son lay. Susie still remains anxious to know exactly

⁹⁵ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

⁹⁶ Marian Teesdale to Harry Pollitt, 19 April 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NLHM.

⁹⁷ B. Alexander, *Memorials of the Spanish Civil War*, 1996, p.67.

⁹⁸ A comparative study with World War One families who tried to have bodies brought home would be fascinating.

⁹⁹ 'The Little Bolshie Who Broke his Mother's Heart,' *South Wales Echo*, 18 July 1996.

where he fell. Marian Teesdale on behalf of the Whitehead family wrote most emphatically to Harry Pollitt,

Mrs Whitehead who is by the way far too ill to write, desires a death certificate and full information how Frank met his death and where and when it happened. She also wants her son's body returned to England in order to bury him in the family grave.¹⁰⁰

The most extreme expressions of grief often directed against the Communist Party came from relatives who had little political knowledge and found it difficult to understand the reasoning behind the volunteer's death. Whilst political understanding did not compensate for the loss of a close relation, many displayed a passionate belief in justifying their kinsfolk's death for the cause. Examples in their letters to newspapers and the Communist Party were used by the latter for propaganda purposes, perhaps to boost morale at home. Other letters found in public archives show the quiet dignity and generosity of spirit shown by bereaved relatives. Their grief was expressed by contributing both money and home comforts to the Republican cause and the British Battalion. The Communist Party thanked 'Comrade Ball' for "your thoughtfulness in sending on the cigarettes from the Reading Branch for our comrades in the Brigade," describing it as a "great action."¹⁰¹ Mrs McLean sent £2 "...for the poor Spanish workers I know that my Dear Son George Bright would wish me to do my best for them seeing that he gave his life for them."¹⁰² Charlotte Owen, a Communist Party activist who had lost her husband at Brunete, wrote to the bereaved parents of Tom Picton. Their reply indicates that Charlotte intended not only to share her own grief but also to support and empathise.

...although you say, we have not had the pleasure of meeting,
we are as one family in sorrow.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Marian Teesdale to Harry Pollitt, 19 April 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NLHM. Of course the latter request could not be granted.

¹⁰¹ Harry Pollitt to M.L. Ball, 18 March 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NLHM. W. Ball fell at Jarama in February 1937.

¹⁰² Mrs McLean to Harry Pollitt, 13 May 1937, CP/IND/POLL/2/6, NLHM. George Bright fell at Jarama in February 1937.

¹⁰³ The Pictons to Charlotte Owen, not dated, SC156, SWCC.

These examples suggest that bereaved relatives, who strongly associated with the political and humanitarian solidarity that the war inspired, displayed certain characteristics for dealing with their grief, which were significantly different to those shown by other apolitical kin in mourning. The ideologies engendered by the Republican struggle were partially mirrored in the way these people coped; their generous donations and sharing of grief. There is little evidence to suggest all politically active mourners became in Charlotte Owen's words 'one family in sorrow.' Grief is after all a very private and individually expressed emotion. Yet their expressions show a collective spirit.

In fact the whole experience for families from their relatives' departure to their return or death; the way they coped financially and emotionally can be split between the politically aware, who appeared to cope better and the experience of the apolitical. This is not to say that some did not lose their faith along the way, or became converts to the cause. Yet all were influenced in some way by the dynamics of the war even if this was to reject the reasons for their relatives' departure or death.

After the civil war in Spain, political debate and discussion continued to dominate the lives of the majority of relatives spoken to. The young families of veterans were growing up during the Cold War period and this was an added dimension to the new set of challenges faced by spouses and children of ex-Brigaders.

THE LONG TERM IMPACT

This section examines whether having an International Brigader as a relative had an impact on individuals or family life, within the sample, in the years after the civil war. The period 1939 to the present is dominated by the Cold War and chronicles the different aspects of the spouses' and children's interaction with the Brigade veteran. It aims to build up a picture of the lives of these people using primarily their testimonies and questionnaires; to be achieved by examining both the recurrent and evocative themes reproduced in their texts. For example, the methods used to orally transmit experience, or the potency of memorabilia.

For many veterans being a member of the International Brigade became an important focus and presence in their lives after they returned and one of the first of many

elements, mainly present in the testimonies of their children, was the knowledge and awareness of their relatives' engagement. A significant phrase was, 'I've known all my life.' Four children mentioned that they had known practically all of their lives, three to the point where they could not remember being told at all.¹⁰⁴

'I've Known All My Life'

The fact that the majority of people interviewed did not know or were not born until after the Brigader had returned meant that at some stage they were made or became aware that their father, mother or husband had volunteered. Particularly interesting aspects of the numerous ways that relatives found out about Spain are the individuals within families who are unconscious of the moment of discovery. So when asked they will respond with 'well, I've always known,' or 'I've known all my life.' This often occurred within highly politicised families active within a political party often the Communist Party¹⁰⁵ and involved in the issues and campaigns associated with their affiliation. Within this context Spain became another aspect of their political experience. Consequently, children living in these households were vague or unconscious of when they first found out because transference became intertwined with knowledge and awareness of other political priorities. This was true of Len and Jeremy's family.

You see my family had such an extraordinary history but [Spain] was only one factor in it. My parents were both immigrants. My mother was imprisoned by the Nazis, my father was a decorated war hero in the British Army.¹⁰⁶

It resulted in Spain being less of a unique occurrence than in other families of Brigaders. Jeremy and Len spoke in terms of the International Brigade being another aspect of their parents' political experience and the discussion of Spain was no different to any other of their activities.

¹⁰⁴ Len and Jeremy are brothers brought up in a political family. Lydia and Dora also came from political families.

¹⁰⁵ All of those mentioned in fn. 104 came from households where their parents were members of the Communist Party.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998.

The Spanish War was one of many things that were in my past...
it wasn't particularly important until really, really very later.¹⁰⁷

I think one needs to put it into overall context, when I was a young lad
to an extent the Second World War was talked about more often.¹⁰⁸

Len and Jeremy serve as an exception to the general rule that having an ex-Brigader within the family prompted unique responses and emotions. For the majority of relatives in the sample, brought up in households where one or both parents were politically active, Spain was considered special and unique particularly as often it was the most important aspect of the veteran's life.

The following section illustrates an aspect of the different and unique quality in the presence of a volunteer in the family and considers the diverse effects it had on a few of the relatives interviewed.

The 'Other Woman'

The idea that Spain was such a significant part of the lives of some veterans, that it was felt to be a tangible, almost physical presence, is present in the testimonies of most of the relatives in the sample. It worked as either a positive or negative force within their relationships. For the majority of sons interviewed (9 out of 13) their fathers' martial exploits and the concept of them fighting for freedom made them heroic figures. Nigel wrote,

I'm sure I was influenced at an early age by the propagandists of
the Brigader magazine who fought their war with the pen. They
presented a glorious war fought by heroes to me as a child, and my
Dad was one of these heroic figures.¹⁰⁹

Several factors contributed to the idolatry of Brigaders by their young sons and daughters; the physical symbols of the War – wounds, memorabilia and sometimes

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Jeremy, 9 February 1998.

¹⁰⁹ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

the presence of other ex-Brigaders. In addition a romantic image of the Republican's struggle was conjured up by debate and discussion, or in Nigel's case the *Volunteer for Liberty* magazines. Therefore these elements were the means by which many built up an heroic vision of their parent.

The ideal of the 'hero' Brigader was, however, wrought with complications for some. Mick idolised his father as a young boy but found it difficult living with a man who had been turned over-night from the working-class hero of his community into being considered as a subversive the result of Cold War paranoia.

After the war it was OK for a bit and it was pretty respected to have done what he did but then with the Cold War, then you started getting the Reds were the enemy and it was that horrible period...and that was the worst bit.¹¹⁰

Mick suspected that his father was continually frustrated that nothing in his life ever lived up to his time in Spain and his own analysis of the personal impact of Spain would point to Mick's assessment being correct. Considerable conflict was caused within the family by his father's frustration. The presence of Spain, which Mick described as "...a very real, palpable thing to me, without ever having been there..."¹¹¹ in many respects worked negatively. Mick's younger brothers, named after their father's colleagues in Spain, wholly rejected their father's politics and any remembrance of the conflict. Unlike Mick they had been too young to experience the elevated status given to their father during and immediately after World War Two. James objected to, "people who talk about my father as a tremendous hero and isn't it marvellous that he went to Spain."¹¹² He tried to normalise his father's actions by saying anyone in the position of a doctor would have done the same and that only the likelihood of him being killed would make his actions heroic. He obviously felt uncomfortable with an image that presented his father as very different from the man he knew which was a very similar reaction to Mick.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹¹¹ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹¹² Interview with James, 22 October 1998

The tangibility of Spain, the sensation that it was almost something palpable that you could touch was enforced by the eagerness of many veterans' to keep it in the forefront of their lives but this could also be tinged with ambiguity. Kitty, the wife of an ex-Brigader, was an associate member of the Communist Party when she was first introduced to her future partner. She recalled that one of the attractions of her future husband was that he had been in Spain. At first Kitty became overwhelmed by the situation and "sort of proud" that they were going out together. Her politicisation, which made her aware of the significance of the International Brigade, combined with the age difference created a deep impression, one with elements of the romantic and heroic.¹¹³ Not unlike Mick's testimony, the continual presence of Spain within their relationship worked to create ambiguous feelings about her husband's participation. Spain came alive through the voice of the veteran and became for Kitty, "as though it was somebody I was jealous of...a tremendous and constant rival for [his] affections."¹¹⁴ Likewise, Nigel described his mother as a 'long suffering spouse.' "I think she became bored by the endless conversations about the civil war." Nigel believed his father had a "love affair with the war because he revelled in the interest which it attracted."¹¹⁵ These emotions are not totally dissimilar to the feelings of many civilian partners of any wars. Exclusion from the heightened sensations men experienced during engagement, such as comradeship, the struggles for survival, guilt and revenge, were common with any conflict.

However, Spain in addition, embodied a strong loyalty from those who had been there. In effect a loyalty to a myth. Their powerful identification with the Spanish Republican cause had prompted the veterans to make the ultimate personal commitment of volunteering. This had subtle differences from fighting at the behest of the state. In effect Spain came to symbolise much more than an extreme experience. For many it was the fruition of their endeavours to enact a political ideal. This is the reason it became such an important aspect of many veterans' lives and why Kitty felt it took on more than a vocal presence. It may explain why when questioned a few male relatives of the Brigaders' generation stated that if they had

¹¹³ Interview with Kitty, 15 February 1999.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Kitty, 15 February 1999.

¹¹⁵ Personalised questionnaire, Nigel, February 2000.

been in a similar position they would have gone. "I'm sure if I'd been at home I would have gone with him."¹¹⁶ The husband of a veteran nurse even experienced momentary feelings of guilt, "...after a while I began to get a feeling of guilt that I hadn't been in Spain myself but of course unless you had the political understanding or motivation for going it's stupid and academic to talk about it. I was fascinated by her stories."¹¹⁷ Their feelings were very similar to contemporaries of the volunteers who had stayed at home. Mick described it in terms of a political hierarchy. "So there was a kind of jealousy and pecking order from the hero to the one who didn't go."¹¹⁸ Pam felt a very different kind of guilt for much of her adult life. Her father continually spoke of his best friend in Spain who had been killed. This led to Pam questioning why she lived instead of her father's comrade, an emotion she now acknowledges as illogical.

He had off-loaded some of that guilt on me, so I felt, why
am I alive and SP's dead...and how ridiculous only a few
years ago realising the complete irrationality...¹¹⁹

The myth that surrounded the volunteers also worked by association. When Jimmy dedicated a song about Spain to his father at a folk club he was 'press-ganged!' "I couldn't get out they just wanted to know everything."¹²⁰ For Ray the effect of myth by association was more intrusive and longer lasting. He became known as ____'s grandson; it was a situation that at the time had a positive effect on him filling him with a certain amount of awe and respect at his grandfather's status.

I didn't think anything of it at that time, a little envy, a little bit
intrigued by the frequency at which it happened. I don't know. I
suppose in a way at that time I was honoured, there is somebody in
my family who is...so well known and you don't think at that time
to establish your own niche, your own personality.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Interview with Harold, 30 March 1999.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Alfred, 1 December 1998.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Pam, 15 February 1999.

¹²⁰ Interview with Jimmy, 23 January 1999.

¹²¹ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

Thus the metaphorical symbol of Spain as the 'other woman' represents a variety of responses, which include, guilt, envy, jealousy or a significant presence, some being extremely negative and long lasting. The ambiguity between the heroic image and the reality of living with this vision may not be unique to the relatives of the volunteers but in terms of their political allegiance and keeping of a certain polarised image of events it is certainly very different.

Having examined the various manifestations of Spain's impact on some of the sample, how and in what form is its presence felt? What methods were used to transfer the experience of war?

THE ART OF WAR STORIES – TRANSMISSION OF MEMORY

Within the context of this research veterans' stories of their civil war experience are not only told but also received. A war story within the context of this research is a combination of transferred images, not only about the conflict but also, political and ideological concepts and messages. These aid relations in the construction of a vision of the ex-Brigader. The variety of ways they are disseminated and how recipients respond become key elements in unravelling the nature and progression of civil war and International Brigade memory.

When we discuss the transference of memory it is automatically thought of as being delivered orally. A veteran's response to the question of how experience and memory are passed on from Brigader to family said, "well orally, that's obvious."¹²² Although verbal interaction was by far the most common means of receiving information the testimonies of interviewed relatives reveal that there were numerous other ways of delivering experience and memory. These have been categorised as physical signifiers and range from war wounds to civil war memorabilia brought home by veterans.

The Oral Stories of War

Orality, the spoken word, is as we have seen the most common method of transmitting the experience of Spain to a relative. The methods and techniques used to deliver information to recipients about the conflict as can be imagined were

¹²² Informal conversation with Dave Marshall, July 1999.

abundant and varied. In this study two distinct methods have been identified within the sample of respondents, around spoken dissemination. The first of these is the anecdote, the most traditional style of story telling.

Anecdotal transference was the fairly typical way that veterans discussed their participation. The stories told could be as detailed or sketchy, as traumatic or jocular as the ex-Brigadier wished. Often anecdotes were used as a means of avoiding discussion of the more traumatic experiences. Interestingly an element of mutuality appeared in the way they were used. Not only were veterans aware of the needs of their listener but also their own desire firstly to awaken curiosity and interest and then later to guide and educate. Fathers often told their young sons tales of adventure to satisfy their boyhood fascination with war and martial exploits. John was told of how his father had kept his cool when finding himself isolated by enemy tanks. He goes on,

So my feelings about Spain I suppose came from a child's curiosity about war and then I suppose my father had killed people in the war [and] quite what first hand combat meant, made gruesome aspects of the war as a sort of fascination that interested a young boy's mind.¹²³

Similarly Joe related the tale of his father's near death experience, "they killed a man further down and were about to kill my father and the officer called out, 'take prisoners.'"¹²⁴ Consequently Joe stated his father had never feared death after that encounter. Again the story remained strongly remembered.

War games amongst young boys were authenticated and glamorised by their father's status as a real warrior and often the stories they chose to relate. James played at Nazis with his friend because they were in the news and wore striking uniforms with the visually powerful swastika. Although he romantically identified with his father in Spain the fascination with the symbols of war held as much appeal whilst he was a young child. "I don't think really at that age I understood in any serious way."¹²⁵

¹²³ Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

¹²⁴ Interview with Joe, November 1999.

¹²⁵ Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

Tales of hardship were also told, usually to children slightly older. Stories of sacrifice and ill treatment were one of the means by which recipients learnt to respect veterans in addition to attracting and holding their attention. Dora was deeply moved by her father's anecdotes of prison life. She talked of how the Brigaders imprisoned by Franco kept up their morale by making chess sets of chewed bread formed into figures and giving each other language, philosophy and politics lessons, "...although conditions were appalling and they were very badly treated on occasions they actually kept up their morale by educating themselves."¹²⁶

The anecdotal style of Pam's father was more forthright and used to attract and hold her attention, even to shock. He related the following to her when she was fifteen.

Another thing that stuck in my mind...he was climbing up some pretty rough terrain...and he turned to call this man who was following him, he said, 'come on why don't you...' and this man...must have just had a bullet through his brain, he was actually dead and falling over when my father turned round... and he just had this vacant look.¹²⁷

Pam remembers this story as one of the first her father told her about Spain. It was most likely to make a tremendous impression upon her, which of course it did, as she remembered it clearly thirty-five years later.

Tales of comradeship often reiterated images of solidarity and unity. Alfred, whose wife was a volunteer nurse, listened to descriptions of her remarkable partnership with a Spanish colleague.

One of the nicest things...when she got to Spain she straight away started working in the theatres with a Spanish surgeon...although he knew no English and she no Spanish there was something about surgery apparently...she knew the instruments he needed, sort of intuitively.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

¹²⁷ Interview with Pam, 15 February 1999.

¹²⁸ Interview with Alfred, 1 December 1998.

Ray's grandfather immortalised his 'father-son' relationship with a young volunteer, killed at Brunete, with his continual stories of their friendship particularly of the eve of the battle where they exchanged mementoes. "But it was the comradeship of that night that sticks in my mind."¹²⁹ And it was the camaraderie that Ray saw as the most powerful image to come out of the Spanish Civil War. To a certain extent enforced by his grandfather's anecdotal style for, "[h]e was a great raconteur and his hands would be going all the time he was talking. He was visually interesting with the stories he was telling."¹³⁰

Thus the effect of anecdotal stories could often be inspirational and life affirming. Was it a coincidence that Dora may have been sufficiently influenced by her father's prison morale stories to herself pursue a career in education? John who heard of his father's near death experience in Spain used them to shape his own thoughts and ideas "about religion and what life is all about."¹³¹ Joe remained in awe of the way his father's near-death experience had influenced his philosophical attitude to death.

Of course in some instances they worked in a negative way. Pam inherited her father's guilt after frequent stories about his lost comrade. Her mother Kitty grew tired of hearing the same stories throughout their married life. However, she became fascinated by his reminiscences towards the end of his life because he began talking about something new, saying, "[i]t was very sad that he didn't talk earlier...he started describing this cook...it was so interesting."¹³²

In all respondents whose veteran relative discussed the war frequently, the instance of anecdotal transference stimulated an interest and awareness outside of their youthful environment and experience. The stories to a certain extent were manipulated by the ex-Brigaders to have the biggest possible impact whether this involved telling young boys adventure stories or reiterating the dominant images of the International Brigade by recollections of comradeship and solidarity.

The second method of oral transmission is unique to the civil war and involved what can be termed the political education of the veterans' children discussed in the previous chapter. Political education administered by ex-Brigaders still active in

¹²⁹ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

¹³⁰ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

¹³¹ Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

¹³² Interview with Kitty, 15 February 1999.

trade unions or local politics meant lecturing or involving their children in debate and discussion on a wide range of subjects related to their particular affiliation usually Communist. Unfortunately only the children of Communist veterans discussed this phenomenon.

The difference even between siblings of the same family in interest in the conflict and politicisation is a further illustration of the impact of oral communication. In addition the circumstances in which children were brought up or the relationship they had with the veteran also contributed significantly to differing feelings between individual brothers and sisters. Of course some might have more than an inclination towards, for instance, political activity and there were other 'outside' influences, such as the families' politicisation. One granddaughter (Janet) wrote of the difficult relationship she'd had with her grandfather, who did not speak about Spain.¹³³ However, both her and her father, James, (who gleaned much of his information about the conflict from his father's colleague) were both politically active. Janet's situation being brought up in a political household would have had a more profound influence on her politicisation than the Spanish Civil War. In another family of three sons and one daughter the latter showed no interest in the International Brigade and what her father had done, despite being spoken to as often as her brothers, who were politically aware.¹³⁴ This is not to assume that the sons of the family were more likely to be interested than the daughters, who have shown an equal if not more enthusiastic interest in their family history.

Thus family circumstances dictated by relationships, personalities and politicisation were factors in the different levels of awareness and interest between siblings. Orality also featured. Veteran preference in relating their experiences to a certain child was an important part of their overall understanding of the conflict. A family interview with Pam and Paul revealed that the highly probable reason why Pam, the elder daughter, became more involved with public expressions of memory, the Friends organisation and politics in general was because her father had directly spoken to her only. Her younger brother explained,

I don't think [my father] ever spoke to me about it on my own.

¹³³ Questionnaire of Janet, May 1998.

¹³⁴ Questionnaire of HHq, January 2000.

The only time I can remember him speaking about it other than very recently was I think when he was talking to you [his sister] about it.¹³⁵

Paul showed less interest in the war and did not participate in any political organisations. On asking Pam whether she believed her father wanted her to pass on his stories she professed to not knowing. It was an idea she had not entertained. Although veterans may naturally talk more often to a child who shows particular interest, her father may have felt that any subconscious duty to translate his political beliefs and experiences of Spain had been dispensed with in telling his eldest child. Similarly Mick and his sister, the two older children of four, were privy to more association with the anecdotes and memorabilia of their father and thus his time as a volunteer. Dora the elder of two sisters always showed more interest in her father's activities. Could it merely be a case of the position and responsibility of the elder child? The importance of oral transmission of experience between veteran and offspring is further demonstrated by the instances of low public participation and apoliticisation of children who were rarely or never spoken to about Spain. The information in **Appendix Five** can be used this time to indicate the number of relatives who did not perceive themselves as politically active.

Brigaders could also be consistent in their transference of experience to siblings. Neil and Nigel, brothers with a nine-year age gap both remembered that anecdotes were their father's strong point. Two very similar stories stuck in their minds. Nigel remembers his father's encounter with Jock Cunningham in Spain. "[He] said something like 'What the fuck do you want?' and producing a pistol, 'How would you like me to blow your fucking head off?'...[Dad] actually found this alarming incident quite funny."¹³⁶ His brother Neil tells a story with a similar theme, "the Russian small arms instructor who, while showing his pupils what not to do with a gun, held a pistol to his own head and blew his brains out."¹³⁷ The tragic-comic violence of these anecdotes suggest they were told as a means of grabbing the

¹³⁵ Interview with Paul, 15 February 1999.

¹³⁶ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

¹³⁷ Personalised questionnaire of Neil, August 1999.

attention of the young boys, although there is no indication of what age the brothers were told the stories.

Appendix Four illustrates how influential the children's backgrounds have been in deciding on their future career. The vast majority chose professions that were a vocation or in the public sector, especially teaching. This feature was particularly high amongst those who had themselves become politically active and markedly lower amongst apolitical relatives. A significant number of creative and self-employed positions may point to the subconscious influence of the unique and independent nature of the Brigaders' actions. A few took similar professional routes to their parents indicating a strong ethical and moral obligation to the lives and examples set by their relative. This was a factor James, the son of a doctor in Spain, was eager to deny regarding his own children.

"Our three children are all very progressive, they're all in socially useful occupations...it wouldn't have occurred to any of the three to become stockbrokers or something like that."

Mrs: "The children did not have a choice, they didn't, They were brought up like you and me."¹³⁸

In fact none of the professions of the relatives in the sample could be described as 'socially useless' or motivated by money.

Unspoken Stories

As important in what orality reveals about the methods of relating war experience is what veterans omit to tell their relatives and the stories they continually relate to hide more painful truths – the safe anecdotes. Jimmy recalls his father talking about, "...his involvement in politics and things like that but in terms of the actual mechanics of the war he never spoke of it..."¹³⁹ He also spoke about war in a generalised way, detaching himself from involvement in the arena of brutality and horror. Talking about political issues related to the civil war such as Communist

¹³⁸ Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

¹³⁹ Interview with Jimmy, 23 January 1999.

theory or the impact of Spain on European events – the ‘headline news,’ as one relative described it, did in certain cases hide a reluctance to talk about the raw and brutal experiences of the struggle.

Not I was in a bar or I was in a café and I went in
and I saw this, no detail.”¹⁴⁰

James believed his father similarly spoke only of macro political issues related to the war, “...because he felt the propaganda on both sides couldn’t tolerate anything near the truth...He would tell you stories that might just have easily occurred any place. How the eggs were boiled too hard or you couldn’t get any.”¹⁴¹ For both James and Jimmy what they wanted was a more human element to the stories, something that indicated their relatives’ emotional involvement. Violence was rarely discussed in front of children. Dora stated her father, “spoke very little about the violence he encountered in Spain.”¹⁴² In the brief time Gwyn’s father was at home after the war the only time they heard what it was like in Spain was during a public meeting.

The most we got out of it was from that public meeting
when he gave a very graphic description of what war is
like. Dive bombers coming down to drop bombs and
machine-gun people.¹⁴³

Joe’s father did not tell ‘war stories,’ neither did Len’s because, “He had a lot of death and destruction and I think either war was terrible to think about.”¹⁴⁴ Instead anecdotes that did not include the brutalisation of the volunteer were disseminated. This is why veterans often spoke of near-death experiences to put their engagement on a philosophical plane rather than a horrific one. They repeated certain ‘safe’ stories, one of the most popular being their climb over the Pyrenees. Stephen recalls

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Jimmy, 23 January 1999.

¹⁴¹ Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

¹⁴² Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

¹⁴³ Interview with Gwyn, 11 August 1999. Gwyn’s father died 10 months after returning home from Spain.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Len, 23 February 1998.

his father spoke of it often.¹⁴⁵ This exemplified the spirit of adventure and of danger without detailing more brutal involvement.

Orality was the most obvious and certainly the most instinctive and popular method of transferring experience of the war. It was strong even when stories remained untold because others replaced them. Yet it was not the only influential component in producing an image of the veteran.

The Symbols of War

Examining the different ways that relatives found out about Spain illustrates how significant events or even objects were the trigger to discovery. The process of transmission and recognition was not only one of voices heard. Dora walked in on her father telling her tearful mother that he was leaving for Spain. Although they did not tell her at that stage she guessed the significance of her discovery for shortly after her father had gone. Susie saw her future husband on a platform of International Brigade speakers at a Communist Party social. Mark aged four was kissed goodbye by his father as he left; he later got to understand its meaning. In all of these circumstances that led up to discovery the relatives were not directly informed and recognition was attached to the event later.

Memorabilia and other symbols could also be a trigger to discovery, usually prompting questions and subsequently explanations. John saw his father's wound for the first time and asked about it. Mick wanted to know what the Spanish words *Republica Espanola* meant on a wood carving hanging on the wall. Jean sorting through old photographs thought the picture of her husband in uniform was taken during the Second World War. All started enquiry and then knowledge into their relatives' involvement.

The physical symbols of the conflict could be found either around the family home and are called war memorabilia, or upon the person of the ex-Brigader, defined as war wounds. Physical signifiers of the war are vitally important in the process of remembering, not only as memory aids or triggers, but also to form meaning around the families' experience and build an image for them of the Brigader. Clifford Geertz

¹⁴⁵ Questionnaire of Stephen, Question 5.

theorised that the recent historiography of social sciences and philosophy have popularised the view that man was "...a symbolising, conceptualising meaning-seeking animal,"¹⁴⁶ driving to make sense out of experience, or within this context, received images. The war wound or item of war memorabilia can be placed in the role of embodying and drawing together that meaning and vision of their relatives. For example, John first became aware of his father's engagement because he saw the deep scar on his arm.

As a young boy I suppose my first knowledge of...his involvement in Spain was really as a fighter and it was the war wounds.¹⁴⁷

The marks of war loomed "visible and tangible" demanding an explanation. Consequently John began to conceptualise his feelings about Spain, what his father's experiences meant to him and how he viewed him. "[Our discussions]...were important in terms of giving me...my main concern – an insight into [my father] I don't think I ever had a terribly strong interest in Spanish history but I was really interested in...what the experience taught me about him..."¹⁴⁸ Other relatives in the sample have also sought in later life to give order and to prioritise their feelings about the ex-Brigader. "So my feelings about Dad's role in Spain have travelled from ignorance to awe, to a more measured analytical and questioning approach, while retaining some of the ignorance and awe."¹⁴⁹ This study may have had a role to play in prompting these responses.

The process of image or vision building is also an important part of any search for meaning. In this context the presence of the veterans' war wounds is significant. Out of the responses of thirty-eight relatives, sixteen indicated that the veteran had been injured in Spain.¹⁵⁰ The wound as physical signifier was especially potent to veterans' young sons, who as boys were eager for knowledge of their father's martial exploits. Mick was very aware of the physical consequences of war from a very early

¹⁴⁶ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Fontana Press, 1975, p.140.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

¹⁴⁹ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

¹⁵⁰ In addition four had been killed and one died ten months after returning from Spain as a result of his time there.

age. He remembers his father's ex-Battalion comrades visiting on a regular basis. "We had people stay with us...Teddy Ward who'd had his legs off...Our house was always full of what other people might call lame ducks, people who were destroyed physically and mentally by the war."¹⁵¹ These people were fascinating to a young child and their presence was intermingled with the glamour of foreign Brigaders, their adult discussions and card games, helping to shape his early views about his father.

I was just so aware all the time that me dad was this hero and he was to me and at the time he was a good man, the problems came later.¹⁵²

In a different way Dora's thoughts about her father were partly shaped by his physical condition. She mentioned how thin he appeared in a picture painted soon after his return from Spain. His physical appearance, part of the experience of war, added to the respect she felt for what he had done.¹⁵³

Although war injuries were an important aspect of finding a meaning and an image, they were only a small part of the non-oral methods of translating the memory of the war. The use of numerous objects of memorabilia, in triggering reminiscences or as props in story telling recurred throughout many of the families' testimonies. These items ranged from personal effects acquired by the veteran during the conflict. Dora's father brought home a pipe engraved with the prison names where he had been incarcerated. This became a symbol around which anecdotes of his time as a prisoner of war were related. He also incorporated other objects, which no longer exist, such as the bread chess pieces. Mick's fascination with a Spanish picture carved in wood by Republican prisoners at a camp for aliens near Oldham has already been mentioned. He was mystified by the Spanish words and what they meant and questioned his father who began to tell him about his service in Spain and about the Republican cause. The picture had acted as a trigger. Mick still possesses the engraving along with the Battalion flagpole with the clenched fist Republican salute carved at the end. This latter object became the centre around which war

¹⁵¹ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹⁵² Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹⁵³ Interview with Dora, 24 August 1998.

games were played. Nigel wove a heroic image around his father after reading *Volunteer for Liberty*. Owen used photographs and letters to tell the story of his father who had been killed at Brunete. In these circumstances memorabilia were not only mementoes of sentiment but also a vitally important part of reconstructing his father's life. Gwyn also used letters, photographs and extracts from books and newspapers to tell the story of his father who he had lost just ten months after his return from Spain.¹⁵⁴

The importance of photographs for stimulating interest and telling stories were not as integral as would first be assumed. Lydia recalled her earliest memory of the war had been a framed photo of her mother in a nurse's uniform.¹⁵⁵ This had triggered stories to both her daughter and husband about the medical work she had undertaken with a Spanish surgeon. However, photographs were seldom used during the formative years of children (up to ten years old) to tell their stories. Only John and his father would sit together some evenings and talk through photographs of his time in Spain. There may have been practical reasons – not everybody would possess dozens of photographs. Only four relatives in the sample stated they owned photos acquired after the veteran had died. However, more did mention their existence as they were growing up.

Why then did so few veterans use photographs to talk about their experiences in Spain? Possible theories may be linked firstly to emotional considerations. An interview with Mark, whose father was killed in Spain, revealed that his mother had never gone through photographs because she refused to allow her life with his father, "to be an emotional thing."¹⁵⁶ They may, for some veterans, have been too painful a reminder, too personal to share, or difficult to explain to a younger child. Secondly, photographs lent themselves more to an anecdotal style of transmitting experience therefore some veterans may have displayed a favourite photo around the house (Lydia for example) that might stimulate a certain kind of discussion less likely to be emotive or unwelcome to the veteran. Anecdotes tended to be used more often with younger children. As some got older political education was introduced which was

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Gwyn, 11 August 1999.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Lydia, 1 December 1998.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Mark, 27 June 1999.

less likely to incorporate the use of picture images. Regimented though this latter theory may appear, in the testimonies of relatives where veterans spoke often to them about Spain, there was for some a reasoning behind why certain methods of translation were chosen.

However, as the children grew up and made their own home lives and families, photographs did become an integral part of remembering and talking about their relatives' participation.

Memorabilia Around the Home

The respondents who kept civil war memorabilia in their homes, of which **Table 4a** shows there were over two-thirds, demonstrates not only an interest in the subject but also a form of allegiance.

Table 4a

Possession of Memorabilia

Memorabilia	Number
Books	25
Memoirs	11
Diaries	1
Political Pamphlets	4
Newspaper Articles	7
Photos	14
Posters	7
Medals/Badges	6
Commemorative (i.e. plates)	2
Other ¹⁵⁷	10
None	8

Source information collected from questionnaires in the sample.

Those who displayed the visual items around their homes,¹⁵⁸ such as photographs, commemorative souvenirs and Spanish pictures illustrated this allegiance or badge. Visiting the homes of the relatives interviewed reveals to what extent they were

¹⁵⁷ Other includes Spanish cultural symbols such as flamenco dancers and official memorabilia produced by the IBA, a wooden engraving, flagpole, programmes of memorial services and cassettes of interviews conducted by relatives.

¹⁵⁸ Thirteen households displayed memorabilia out of the seventeen homes visited.

interested or influenced by the civil war. The most striking examples were whole rooms dedicated to the collection and display of books. Mark had at least fifty about the conflict in his study. Likewise did John. These were surpassed however by Ray's impressive library of over four hundred books, all categorised into specialisms such as military histories, novels, British Battalion and so forth. He explained how he began collecting over twenty years ago and travelled all over the country, even to France finding limited and first editions. His interest began while researching material for a book on his grandfather's time in Spain.¹⁵⁹ He told a fascinating tale of his attempts to secure a rare volume of Stephen Spender's poetry. A visit to a red bookshop in Chelsea revealed that a copy had been sold the week before and a further bookshop address was given. Some time later they visited the shop. "We went in and asked if he'd got a copy, he said yes, and I couldn't believe it. He went behind a glass case and then he said, it's not here I must have sold it. I thought oh God, high, low. Just as we were going he said, hang on, I've not put it under Spender, I've filed it under Hogarth Press books and he took it out...It was £200 and when I saw the price I started to walk out the shop and then I thought, no, I've been looking for it for so long."¹⁶⁰ Ray's collection represents not only a fascination with the civil war but also a personal and professional interest in literature. Books about the Spanish Civil War and International Brigade were in fact the most popular items possessed and the best indicator of interest.

The displaying of objects around the home can be associated with a strong desire firstly to have a constant reminder of the war. Secondly, through these reminders invite others to enquire as to their meanings and finally to show their pride and support for the volunteers' engagement. This allegiance was shown in a variety of ways. One house displayed the official memorabilia commissioned by the International Brigade Association.¹⁶¹ The items on show included commemorative plates and mugs, even specially designed postcards, many produced for the sixtieth anniversary. The majority displayed books. Some objects although not on show in

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

¹⁶¹ In Martha's house visited 15 March 1999.

living rooms were brought downstairs from boxes and cupboards like precious treasure.



The impressive library at Ray's home in Wales had to be incorporated into a small room of its own - the bookshelves covering an entire wall. Note the other Spanish memorabilia. (Photo: NS)

A further indicator of both interest and close association with the war were the two homes that contained cultural symbols. In Dora's house, for example, a painting by Spanish artist Alberti with prints of matadors and flamenco dancers. Spain was held as affectionately for some of the relatives as for the veterans. As the wife of one ex-volunteer said, it was an easy place to become attached to, "...there was a very strong emotional feeling...linked up too with the emotional attitudes of English

people for a long time towards Mediterranean countries right from the time of Byron.”¹⁶²

The clearest indicator of a sentimental attachment but not necessarily an interest in the Brigade and the conflict were photographs. After books they were the most common objects of possession. As mentioned above they were rarely used by veterans to tell stories. Yet over the years many relatives in the sample have come to appreciate and treasure their importance in keeping the memory of individual Brigaders. Photographs framed on walls, like other memorabilia reinforced feelings of pride and allegiance. Dora, for example, had a montage of enlarged photos of her father in Spain. Photos were also kept in special albums most commonly pictures of the 1996 Homanaje in Spain.¹⁶³ The older photos taken in Spain during the war (mainly tiny or in poor repair) were fewer.¹⁶⁴ These were usually kept in boxes among other old photos. The latter are of special value and sentimental importance to relatives who lost a brother or father in Spain. Susie had few items that belonged to her brother, except a couple of photographs. Owen produced photos of his father, killed at Brunete, one taken professionally in Madrid in his uniform. He used these and other items to tell the story of his father, which the memorabilia helped him to reconstruct.¹⁶⁵ Harold who also lost a brother at Brunete had his interest awakened, after nearly sixty years of dormancy by a publicly displayed photo of his brother in Spain at an exhibition.

I goes down I didn't know it was this till it was up on the
wall, going round and there it was I could see [my brother's]
photo there it was the first time I'd seen it.¹⁶⁶

Photos amongst all memorabilia hold a special place for the relatives. They are a link to the veterans' past, the evocation of an image and a memory, particularly precious to those who lost a family member. All types of civil war memorabilia were more

¹⁶² Interview with Kitty, 15 February 1999.

¹⁶³ Jean, Susie and Dora had special albums of the 1996 Homage.

¹⁶⁴ However, reprints could often be ordered from the Imperial War Museum. Some relatives possessed photos that had also appeared in books about the Battalion.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Owen, 18 August 1999.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Harold, 30 March 1999.

commonly displayed in the houses of children than in spouses' homes, especially if the veterans were still alive. Almost half of the relatives in the sample actively collected memorabilia related to the civil war, again mainly children. Both are indications of the desire amongst subsequent generations (within the sample) to be closer to the event they were not part of. Displaying memorabilia as a sign of allegiance and a continuation of the fascination with Spain was originally passed on by their veteran relative. Can the effects that symbolic objects had on the sons and daughters of Brigaders be passed onto their children? The progression of memory through the generations is important as a foundation for keeping the remembrance of the International Brigade alive.

The Progression of Memory

Transferring the memory of the war onto the next generation had understandably been the role of the veterans if they have chosen to discuss their engagement with members of their family, which not all of them did. This position gradually has to change as the Brigaders pass away and the task naturally falls onto their own children. Whilst many of the grandchildren of veterans had known them and were old enough to have the conflict explained, others were either too young when their grandparent died or had never known them because they had been killed in Spain or died before they were born. In these situations it fell to their parents, the children of volunteers, to assume the role of storyteller.

How comfortable did they feel in taking on a part that was traditionally filled by the protagonist? Did they feel in certain circumstances where the veteran was absent that they became important as transferers of the memory? What was the progression of memory down the generations dependant on? Did there need to be close contact or a good relationship between veteran and grandchild? Was their vocality essential or could more importance be attached to their children in bringing them up in a political household?

The most striking feature was how in any familial situation veterans' children in the sample underplayed their role in transmitting the experience of war.¹⁶⁷ This in spite of indicating the importance of the memory of the war within families. When asked directly about the part they had played a significant number chose to discuss the veterans' role or the level of their children's politicisation. This may have been, for them, the most significant feature of how children learnt about Spain but it felt like many were avoiding the question or were unsure of where they fitted in. Pam when asked directly how she had transferred the memory onto her son explained, "I think he's been around a lot when my father's been talking to me...I think he may have actually got a bit of first-hand knowledge about it...He was saying to me I would like to know a lot more about the Spanish Civil War. There's plenty of books he can read."¹⁶⁸ Importance is placed firmly with the veteran, undermining her own role by firstly, emphasising first-hand transmission and secondly, when directly asked by her son for information, referring him to literature as a means of acquiring this knowledge. Martha, a veteran's wife, similarly when asked, "Did you talk to the children?" replied, "I think he talked to the children."¹⁶⁹ Rhodri talked of his children's politicisation above his own place in the remembrance and Joe when asked how he had transferred the memory to his children omitted to mention his own role, talking instead of how he believed his daughter and son felt about their grandfather and his actions.

Several relatives in the sample did intimate quite briefly their own part in the transmission of memory. Mick believed his role had been very subjective and in many respects, in the past, indirect. Yet he felt as they all got older the importance of continuing family history became paramount.

I've always been proud of what me Dad and Mum did and they've seen pictures...I think they've picked up a pride in the fact that somebody went out to fight for a cause that they thought was right.

¹⁶⁷ Thirteen relatives who had children were asked directly about how they had transferred the memory of the war. Only two spoke in any depth about their role. Six others talked very briefly, hardly mentioning themselves and four others disregarded their part completely, speaking instead of the veteran.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Pam, 15 February 1999.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Martha, 15 March 1999.

[They] are getting to the stage where they want to know more now because as your kids get older and you get older they realise you're not going to be there forever so they're going to have to pick up the memories of the family.¹⁷⁰

Both Mark and Lydia mentioned fleetingly their own part. Mark in that he did not want to impose his beliefs about the war onto his children. Lydia admitted her son's interest in Spain and politicisation was partly her doing. Only Susie and John talked tangibly about their role in translating the memory. Susie spoke retrospectively of how she talked to her daughter of the brother she lost in Spain.

Oh she was very fond of my brother. She was a little girl when he went and she would ask where he was and then over the years we talked about it and she knew about Spain. We discussed it...¹⁷¹

John talks prospectively of how he will educate his young children about what their grandfather did in Spain. "I think I would like to show my children when they are a bit older *To Die in Madrid* and maybe *Land and Freedom*...particularly my daughter. If you've seen that film it starts off with the grand-daughter opening a suitcase of her grandfather's...and my father actually has an almost identical little suitcase with all his pictures and I think my daughter...will get to understand through that."¹⁷² John was eager to appeal to the interests of his children on a very emotional level, as his father had appealed to him. John was very moved as a child by *To Die in Madrid* and obviously hopes the film would have a similar meaning for his own children. One of the reasons why Ray wrote a book was "as a record for my kids." His was a very definite and conscious contribution to transferring experience on, "...trying to keep his torch bright and also communicating his... life and the lives of others and what it was like during the 30's."¹⁷³

However, most usually the children in the sample downplayed their role particularly if there was or had been a strong presence from the veteran. Alternatively if the

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Mick, 5 August 1999.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Susie, 24 November 1998.

¹⁷² Interview with John, 6 July 1998.

¹⁷³ Interview with Ray, 8 October 1999.

volunteer had been killed in Spain or before their grandchildren were born did the children's role increase? More importantly how did they see their place? This proved difficult to establish in terms of the sample. Mark's mother, for example, was also in Spain and so her presence may have had an influence. He sees his part as fairly neutral not wishing to impose his own views. For Gwyn, whose father died shortly after returning from Spain there is the additional influence of his wife's parents. They were victims of the Nazi concentration camps and so there are two separate strands of family history to contend with. Susie, whose brother was killed in Spain, found an energetic role in communicating to her daughter the importance of the conflict although her husband was also a Brigader. Owen, who lost his father, is the only person his children can talk to about their grandfather. He described how they asked him all sorts of questions. "I tell my children...It was his belief to fight for freedom."¹⁷⁴ Harold has only latterly become the voice for his dead brother's actions. He has enthusiastically attempted to get his family interested. Although there are only two clear examples they illustrate that the relatives who lost someone assumed a role, either because they had to as the person with answers or because they wanted to.

Many grandchildren were equally or even more fascinated by Spain and more political than their parents. This usually occurred when their veteran grandparent was still alive and was vocally expressive about the Brigade especially strong if they lived in a political household and had a close relationship with their grandparent. Ray had a good relationship with his grandfather who told him marvellous stories about Spain. This inspired him later to write a book about his grandfather's experiences. Lydia's son also had a close relationship with his grandmother and was also brought up in a political family. He is highly politicised, with an interest in the Brigade. Pam's son wished to know more about the war after hearing his grandfather's stories. Being brought up in a political family was a key factor in sparking off an interest in Spain and its politics. The brothers Jeremy and Len brought their children up in a politically active household, very much like their own, the result being that their children are politicised with a fascination for the civil war. Janet had a difficult

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Owen, 18 August 1999.

relationship with her grandfather but was brought up in a political household. Here the role of the parents was of especial importance in shaping her interests in Spain and in wider political issues.

Of course the politics of the volunteers would be very much sympathetic with any political leanings of grandchildren and so both are irretrievably linked. Where the grandchildren's interest outshines their parents, the relationship between first and second generation and the veteran is important. The relationship between grandchild and grandparent is a less contentious one than between child and parent. Neither do they usually have to live with each other and so their time together is often easier and more enjoyable. Grandchildren are more willing to learn and take advice from a grandparent. It is easier for ex-Brigaders to become idols and for them to see the heroic side of the veteran without the emotional clutter of a disciplinarian parent.

The dynamism of the memory of the Brigade is guaranteed in many of the families interviewed. Some first-generation relatives have commented on how they see history repeating itself in their children. John noticed how his young son was similarly interested in his grandfather's war wounds and that he had been a warrior. Mick's youngest son was also attracted to the glamorous, martial elements of the war, that his granddad had a revolver, that he had killed people. He plays identical jousting games with the Battalion flagpole as his father did. So the memory of Spain continues down the generations despite the first generation's reticence to discuss their own part, which may have been much to do with them not having thought much about it before.

The veteran, so vocal in their own lives with lectures and anecdotes, is assumed the keeper and transferor of memory. So it is only perhaps now or within the next few years, as the Brigaders become fewer, that their children will fully realise their position.

Conclusions

This study has examined and reconstructed the lives of a homogenous group of people whose commonality is their kinship with an International Brigader. However, some relatives were in closer proximity to others or reacted differently because of the nature of their relationship. Partners or spouses were more likely to distance themselves from the Civil War, seeing it as the veterans' territory, even if they also followed a similar political path to their partner. Quite a few wives were bored by constant talk of Spain and it was much more usual for International Brigaders' children to want to learn about Spain. Similarly veterans were more eager to pass information onto their offspring than to their partners.

The sample of people I spoke to show the profound influence the civil war singly had on their lives. Some lost a parent when they were very young. Others lived with veterans for whom Spain was the most significant and important event of their lives. How would that make a child feel? Yet there are fewer others who cannot distinguish it from the impact of World War Two and for whom it has had a minimal impact or interest. Obviously the closer the relationship the more involved a relation became. This was particularly noticeable with relatives such as brothers or sisters who had been part of the household when the volunteers had left for Spain. Their memories of this period are very descriptive and intense. Certainly one of the more interesting themes to emerge saw a few relatives trying to lay the ghost of Spain to rest. Whether this involved their relationship with the veteran or coming to terms with the death of a loved one.

The interviews with relatives form the foundation of the latter section of this chapter. Their testimonies open up a whole range of experiences from the viewpoint of people very much on the sidelines, especially if they entered the veteran's life after the civil war. However, there is a sense that many of the more ambiguous feelings towards the veteran were not discussed in the interviews. The majority of the respondents were intensely loyal to the memory of their relative when their circumstances suggested the war must have had a tremendous impact on their life. The most brutally honest and therefore interesting interview was with Mick, full of ambiguous feelings towards his father, both anger and pride.

Letters were the single most important documents in reconstructing the first part of the chapter on the short-term impact. Without surviving correspondence there would not have been the more intimate and personal interactions between volunteers and their families. The letters bring an immediacy and intensity to the daily longings and traumas felt on both sides. Indeed without them it would have been impossible to reconstruct in any depth the civil war period.

The chapter is dominated by the experiences of International Brigade relatives who were not the only family of volunteers. Although there were far fewer in the ILP contingent that went to Spain the memoirs and experiences of their relatives would have added a whole new dimension to this research. How would this group have reacted both collectively and individually to their ostracism from the official history of the volunteers and the controversies that surrounded their engagement in Spain? Similarly the relatives of International Brigaders who were neither interested nor proud of their heritage for the most part eluded the research. Their few responses were either neutral or sparse while others showed outright negativity. Some of these relatives were ashamed or even careful to disassociate themselves from the International Brigade. One veteran wrote that any mention of the civil war amongst his family would have caused major problems. What were the circumstances of their upbringing that made them reject their father's past? These questions are so much more difficult to answer because of their unwillingness to talk or be part of any research.

Yet in spite of the knowledge of disinterested or negative responses the British Brigade and Spanish Civil War continues to have an influence on a significantly larger number of people than originally went to Spain as volunteers.

CONCLUSION

In the twentieth century Britain twice experienced the sociological, cultural and psychological impact of total war. A phenomenon that necessitated the involvement, in varying degrees of intensity, of the whole civilian population. For the first time war became the concern of not just the soldier but also the non-combatant, whether this was assertively, by working in war industries, or passively as the victims of aerial bombardment. Although the anxieties that plagued mothers, sisters, sweethearts, partners and children, when male relatives went to fight, were not new to the twentieth century, the sheer numbers that were affected was without precedent; I have already mentioned that one in three people in Britain lost someone close in the Great War. Subsequently, the two world conflicts changed life in Britain dramatically and this included the family. Perhaps the most tragically affected after children were parents who, with advances in public hygiene and medicine, had come to expect that their children would outlive them. War took that certainty away.

How then can a foreign war with no direct bearing on Britain compare to the enormity of the two world wars it was sandwiched between? The Spanish Civil War involved only approximately 2,100 men and women who volunteered outside of the law without the sanction of the state. The answer of course is that it cannot. Thus the memory of the Spanish Civil War and the experiences of the family of British volunteers should surely not be able to add considerably to our understanding of war on the collective consciousness or non-combatants. However, to assume that because the Spanish Civil War was not a state sanctioned conflict posing little threat to national security or because it involved a numerically small group of citizens and therefore affected an insignificant amount of people, ignores many fascinating issues. These ultimately add to the debates about our understanding of war and its 'total' impact and also to a historiography that is increasingly looking to dispel some of the myths created by past literature. Thus the research has tried to examine how the image of the combatant can be built up using literature, the family, the labour movement and the veterans themselves and how the memory of the war has been forged and then monopolised. An important aspect of remembrance has been the influence of politics and how this has become an integral part of the vision of the war. The non-protagonist has become a new source on research into the war namely

by using the testimonies and manipulating documents pertaining to the non-protagonists and bringing a fresh angle to study on the British Battalion.

Within these three areas of enquiry rests the main arguments represented in the research. The most important in terms of finding evidence to build up a comprehensive study was the discovery that all family members of International Brigade veterans were and remain marginalized. All those associated with the gathering and keeping of the memory often unintentionally have ignored the presence, role and contribution of the volunteers' relations. Archivists have given no special place to the relatives when cataloguing their material. Likewise the gatherers of documentation have only included items of interest related to the veterans. Thus, for example, letters written by family are only valuable in terms of what they divulged about the volunteer. In a similar way interviewers rarely spoke to relations unless they could fill in missing information about the Brigader, nor did they ask veterans about private matters viewing this as a subject families might find too personal or intrusive. Researchers and academics continue to write about every aspect of the British Battalion but remain largely unconcerned about the wider impacts of their engagement. Even the veterans attach little importance to the experiences of their families in relation to their own. This is hardly surprising, the movement of historical study that saw a shift towards a social perspective and history from below in the 1960's meant the experiences of the lowest ranking soldiers added a new and illuminating dimension to war studies. However, most recently research on the combatant in modern warfare has moved towards ethical and moral questions and these have to include the family.

Another important argument presented in the study is the exclusivity and the divisive and partisan nature of the memory of British International Brigaders. These three elements are strongly linked to the political orthodoxy practised by the few influential members within the IBA. All groups outside of the International Brigade volunteers are excluded from remembrance. This most politically includes the Independent Labour Party (ILP) contingent whose 'inactivity' during the fiercest fighting and association with the social revolution in Barcelona has over the years remained a bone of contention for ex-members of the International Brigade. The controversial nature of the war's remembrance even experiences friction within the

IBA membership associating itself with the political persuasion of the veterans. Here controversy is fuelled again by the orthodox communism of the inner circle of the IBA and the diverse left wing loyalties of the veterans. Splits have occurred not only with the way the volunteers should be remembered but also with the organisation of how their memory should be continued. Whilst writing this study the Secretary of the IBA passed away. This may result in a change in the structure of the IBA and Friends of the International Brigade (FIB), with the possibility of the two groups merging, although retaining their identities. It could mean the Friends taking on more of an organisational role; perhaps in arranging memorial ceremonies, until eventually they will take over completely as the veterans become too infirm and pass away.

The Communist Party remains the dominant influence in the remembrance and the shaping of memory because it is linked so strongly to the history of and make-up of the Brigade. Over three-quarters of the Brigade were members of the Party who were the most active in recruiting and persuading people to go to Spain. Their battles with other left wing groups often became those of the British Battalion command and a majority of the rank and file. Thus the civil war has in memory largely become governed by the political experience.

I think it really did define everything. It didn't just
for me personally. I think the general outlines for
who were going to be goodies and baddies was
set in Spain.¹

Literature and other artistic and cultural forms have made a major contribution in influencing as well as managing the myths that surround the Brigaders and the civil war. Its significance has been achieved in the way material has been written and presented, for example, what people have chosen to display, the subject matter and how the end product has been received by Brigaders and their family. Literary and other forms both reflect and perpetuate the myths for new generations of relatives.

The final point is central to this study; that the relatives of volunteers are important contributors to the keeping and transferring of Brigade remembrance in Britain.

¹ Interview with James, 22 October 1998.

Their proximity to the veterans, their experiences obtained through the stories of war and the political intensity of their upbringing are invaluable to the continuation of a varied and stimulating memory.

The historiography of the civil war and British Battalion is one of the mediums through which myth and political allegiance have been continued. The vision of the volunteers and the memory of the Spanish Civil War in Britain has reflected public attitudes and events, such as renewed interest in the war after Franco's death, resulting in the relaxation on information and thus the production of more academic works and memoirs. Yet equally literary representations have become responsible for creating their own images of the International Brigade especially literature written outside of what the IBA has approved. The texts that have caused the most controversy and outrage among guardians of the official history of the volunteers have become the most popular, well used and well known.

Popular memory – the representations that reach a wider, more diverse audience are often oppositional or alternative. Related to who produced them and to the general prejudice against Communism. So when asked to name a book about the Spanish Civil War people usually respond with George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*.² The alternative texts have become institutionalised, *Homage to Catalonia* is studied in schools and along with Hugh Thomas is a set text for most university book lists on the inter-war period. There are two reasons behind this phenomenon; firstly the authors are well known outside of the circle that is fully aware of the Spanish Civil War. Orwell, Laurie Lee and Ernest Hemingway were famous writers. Their other work is well read and assessable thus operating in the mainstream. It follows that the public are more likely to choose these authors. Secondly work such as Hugh Thomas' mammoth *The Spanish Civil War*, and Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* stand-alone. Hugh Thomas' book was the first major history about the war to be published since the end of the Second World War. Likewise, Loach's film was the first to be produced in Britain with a fairly widespread circulation. All portrayed an image of the war and the Brigaders that did not conform to the official

² In an informal conversation with Chris Culpin, GCSE Examiner and author of many history texts for schools, the two books he instantly mentioned were Hugh Thomas' *The Spanish Civil War* and *Homage to Catalonia*.

interpretations favoured and promoted by the International Brigade Association (IBA).

Despite the mainstream image being the most popular, it is the official history that carries the dominant and collective vision of the volunteers and the civil war. This collective includes the majority of the labour movement, most veterans and their family. It has been the tireless aim of the official history, in the shape of a few ex-combatants, to guide all aspects of literary memory, in what should be read or produced, in an attempt to mould the image of their engagement and politics. Thus the historical continuum of the literature has been directly guided and influenced by the IBA. Family find themselves marginalized by the structures and patterns of interest that favour the combatants. Relatives have also seldom made significant appearances in memoirs or write of their own experiences. However, these patterns will change, albeit slowly. All ready the last few years has experienced a perceptible change in, for example, literary interest outside of the combatants. Prominent authors of war fiction, such as Sebastian Faulks and Pat Barker have incorporated the relatives of veterans into their narratives. Whilst this could merely be a device to tell the story from an unusual angle; equally it might be the start of a move towards interest in the families of veterans and the effect of war on subsequent generations. This shift is fairly inevitable as ex-combatants become fewer and fewer. However, interest in the experiences of International Brigade veterans' relatives will be much slower. The romanticism that has attracted such fascination with the volunteers continues to exert its power over the imagination, resulting in the monopoly of the veterans' narratives over all others.

[My mother] has heard all the stories umpteen times and is now thoroughly bored with them. She has commented several times that the IB members seem to think that the Spanish Civil War was the only war that was ever fought. But to be fair to the comrades, one war is more than enough for any person to be involved in and is bound to leave the survivors with powerful memories.³

³ Personalised questionnaire of Neil, July 2000.

Combine this with the rigid control of the memory by some veterans and little room is left for the stories of their relatives.

Families have also been marginal to the public remembrance of the war in striking contrast to state war commemoration. Within the overall context of the war the families' role remains minimal. Since the civil war came to an end archives, organisations, researchers, even veterans have been complicit in the marginalisation of Brigaders' relatives. Until the public memory began to take off after Franco's death in the mid 1970's families were isolated from each other. Few relatives had met with others in the same position as them. Does it therefore follow that their influence over the construction of British Brigade memory has also been peripheral? Research has shown that many family members have, through their fascination and pride, wanted to take an active part in the way the civil war and volunteers are memorialised. Whilst their influence will not be fully felt until there are no Brigaders left some relatives have begun to make their voices heard.

The Friends organisation is very much concerned with the principles and ethos of the Brigade, which reiterates their message and purpose. In many respects its existence reaffirms the legitimacy for them of the original act. Friends anticipate the amalgamation of their group with the veterans' association which will eventually give them authority and responsibility for the official memory of the British contribution. Relatives have also played a part in public commemorations, although this has not been so pronounced as political involvement. It would appear that the majority of family members who instigated civil war memorials had lost a relation in Spain or one who had subsequently passed away. Their intervention makes the purpose of the memorials very similar to the original purpose of World War One monuments – as sites of mourning, although the desire to have their relatives' sacrifice publicly acknowledged I believe plays a more significant part.

In the future family will have an increasingly important role to perform in ensuing the remembrance of the war is continued. At present they rely on the veteran to conduct this task but it cannot continue indefinitely. Soon those relatives who find it important will have to assume the task for themselves even if they retrace the arguments of the veterans. This is a role the Friends are preparing to take on. Indeed only a few relatives in the sample admitted questioning the rationale of the

Brigaders, instigated usually through 'controversial' literature or events in or involving the Soviet Union.

Essentially official images portray the International Brigaders as dedicated political warriors, not fighters in the normal sense because of their attachment to the Communist Party. On another level they have a mythical status emphasised again by official history, clinging to symbols such as La Pasionaria's farewell speech and the battle of Jarama, continually reiterating and reproducing them in turn linked to the romantic image of the Brigader clung to by some of the family members.

These guys were sensitive, articulate, aware of conscience,
not your typical SAS guys. Guys who would have in their
combats a copy of the *Iliad*.⁴

The pacifist soldiers, the well-read warrior, the political fighter, all have ambiguities. This miasma of differing interpretations makes it very difficult to determine the ultimate impression of the volunteer as either political agitator or warrior. The arguments are strong for each title. Did not Brigaders show the same tenacious 'never say die' attitude at Jarama as conscripted airmen during the Battle of Britain? Was not the overwhelming motivation of volunteers to fight dominated by the politics of the day? It is impossible to examine the volunteer in isolation stripping away the turbulent set of events that dominated *European and domestic politics and society*. Thus the research has highlighted the backgrounds and value systems of them and their relatives with representations in literature, song and film and the role of the labour movement concluding that the Spanish Civil War combatant was a political agitator. However, family and labour movement appear more inclined to view them as fighters of conscience.

I know that my father helped to instil in me a sense of right and wrong but I don't think that that was particularly connected with his politics or the Spanish Civil War. Its just one of the tasks of fatherhood. However, I dare say that over the years my various contacts with my father's friends and comrades have helped to

⁴ Interview with Jimmy, 23 January 1999.

consolidate my own view that justice and freedom are values worth fighting for.⁵

Thus they retain the epic of the warrior image made unique by the symbolism of the volunteer.

The reason behind the success of the official history lies with the forceful and energetic personalities of the IBA. Until the death of Bill Alexander the organisation, despite its size, geographical spread and declining numbers remained active with an uncompromising political stance and undying belief in the cause of Spanish democracy and anti-fascism combined with their special concern for the Spanish people long after the end of the war. The engagement of the International Brigaders and other volunteers is dominated by politics and consequently the labour movement has become central in memorialising the war. In the 1930's the majority of the labour movement particularly the Communist Party and the rank and file of many left-wing organisations was at its most engaged. The civil war is a crucial part of the memory of the Communist Party. Public remembrance has therefore been expressed through left wing politics. The Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade within left tradition was and remains a unique and emotive symbol. During the 1930's it saw the engagement of most of the labour movement rank and file on an unprecedented scale. In the 1980's *when undermined by Thatcherism the International Brigade was worn as a badge of pride in labour movement heritage*. The erection of memorials to the volunteers was at its height in this period. Mainly the result of labour dominated trades' councils and borough councils they became a new expression of left wing resistance to the resurgent right wing ideology. In recent years councils and councillors have continued to play a part in their erection, most notably Plaid Cymru (at Burry Port and Llanelli), demonstrating an emphatic Welsh nationalistic pride in the volunteers.

However, the movement was by no means completely united by the Spanish Civil War except in its desire to see a victorious Spanish Republic. Methods and goals differed substantially. The 1930's were one of the few occasions that set the movement alive. A similarly hard-pressed left in the 1980's clung to the romantically

⁵ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

viewed solidarity of the 1930's. Did this politicisation give new meaning to the war memorial? Traditionally they are symbols of loss and bereavement, or in other cases reminders of war and social and psychological devastation. Therefore Spanish Civil War memorials could be said to represent a physical signifier of left tradition. Quite possibly this is felt by some of the family members, who were uppermost in organising the installation of several monuments, but these numbered very few. Thus the International Brigade and the Spanish Civil War is unique within the remembrance context as an emotive symbol in their fight against reaction and the state. Also entrenched within left politics are the popular motifs of the war, non-intervention, anti-fascism, opposition to social revolution, democracy versus barbarism and good versus evil. These have become crystallised and affirmed by endless debate and discussion especially over the last twenty-five years. The language specifically connected to the political struggle and the volunteers has reinforced a mythical and political continuum. This has often been reproduced on memorials. 'No Pasaran!' 'Defence of Liberty.' 'You are History, You are Legend.'

The attitude of the Communist Party towards the family of the volunteers they had recruited was often ambiguous. Whilst the CPGB leader, Harry Pollitt, empathised with the situation many relatives were left in; others within the Party hierarchy, both in Britain and Spain displayed only grudging responsibility to them. A certain mode of behaviour was expected from relatives as well as the volunteer, putting political obligations before those of the family. After the war Communist politics often impacted on families especially when the veteran continued their engagement. Where participation was particularly strong it influenced the everyday routines of family life, such as time spent with children at home. In these cases there was often a strong oral tradition in the form of political education from parent to child. Within the sample few resented this intrusion seeing their parents' participation and the family life this created as normal. For others it represented a glamorous, exciting grown-up world they could be part of.

Outside of the political arena there were short-term impacts on the family covering the civil war period. Relatives of volunteers had virtually no direct involvement with the course of the war in Spain. However, it was within the power of relations to prevent would be Brigaders from stepping foot on Spanish soil. Many married men

with dependants took it for granted that their partners or other close relatives would keep children and home safe and together. Without them married volunteers may have found it extremely difficult to leave.

Whilst in Spain family were a great source of comfort and encouragement to the fighters but for some they acted like a magnet drawing them back home. They were also a hindrance to recruitment. The Communist Party was most reluctant to send attached men to Spain. What the relatives have helped to illustrate most clearly was the irresistible compulsion of the volunteers to give up everything and go to Spain. Other research and oral history has given the reasons why men were prepared to risk their lives but the leaving of family and the anguish this caused revealed by the study affirms and highlights the incredible sacrifice made but also the selfishness and dedication needed to be a political soldier.

When Dad decided he had to go to Spain, he said to Mum, 'Do you mind? Do you mind? I can't tell people that we need to volunteer...and then I go home.' Now frankly he shouldn't have gone. He had chest trouble...that made him useless in World War One. He was declared medically unfit...But he was a man of principle, he said, I can't exhort people to go unless I'm prepared to go. Do you mind? Do you mind?' And she said, 'No. I don't like you going but I can see your arguments and I can see you want to go.' ...[but] the further down you go the more convinced they were that Dad was desperately wrong. He should not have gone. Leaving Mam to bring up five boys it's a hell of a lot on Parish Assistance.⁶

Yet history, the official version and the adoration of much of the labour movement have obscured the awkward side of the war. It has seen it fit, in keeping with most war propaganda, to gloss over the painful reactions of family to the deaths of their relatives in Spain. Only glorious accounts and the stoicism and resignation of family are highlighted.

In the long-term the years since the civil war for some politically engaged families have not been made unique or special by their relatives' time in Spain. They have

⁶ Interview with Gwyn, 11 August 1999.

contextualised their experiences with involvement in the Second World War. Thus Spain is not their only influence. However, for the majority of the sample the civil war has dominated the lives of their parent or spouse and consequently affected their own. In these cases the image they have received appears either consciously or unconsciously to be controlled and planned. This has occurred in the transference of memory and visions of the war.

Transference is not only oral in terms of stories or political education but through the choice of which child to tell or memorabilia to display. The impact, varied and diverse, has been felt in the public lives of relatives. There has to be a correlation between the overwhelming number of children in vocational or what can be considered socially useful professions and their upbringing. In spite of the significant presence of Spain felt by family members the progression of its image and memory remains largely outside of their jurisdiction?

The findings of this research have shown that the family of International Brigaders have much to say about the British Battalion and the Spanish Civil War. Their testimonies shed new light on the lives of the veterans particularly after Spain, a topic that has attracted little interest to researchers on the British volunteers. In addition their own lives provide an insight into the non-combatants of a war and the non-protagonists of a significant event. Whilst many of the family interviewed perpetuated the myths that surround the volunteers and the view of the civil war in Britain, particularly among Communist Party members; others reveal a less romantic side. Families were left to cope financially and emotionally with no state assistance and little other help. Those that came after sometimes had to compete with Spain if it dominated their parent or partner's life.

By collecting the testimonies of a number of relatives a completely new source in the study of the International Brigade in Britain has been provided. The majority of these people have never spoken before about their own experiences within the context of the civil war and if they have, not about themselves, but about the veteran.

I enjoyed the challenge of answering your questionnaire
because in articulating my answers, it revealed some things
to me about my perception of my father which I would

probably not have discovered otherwise. This was personally very helpful to me.⁷

Other existing sources have been given new treatment. Letters examined through the family's perspective shed new light on the feelings of guilt and homesickness felt by many volunteers. They give immediacy to the emotions of longing and fear that their relatives struggled with on a daily basis. Finally existing archive material such as Communist Party documents have never been used before to reconstruct the attitudes of this dedicated and disciplined political organisation to the relatives of their volunteers. The documents highlight the importance the Communist Party attached to the cause over the private lives of both Brigaders and their families. Similarly the Foreign Office papers are not just a source to reconstruct the numbers and circumstances of deserters but also their attitudes to family and volunteers. They give further evidence of the emotional strain experienced by relatives.

Could the findings of this survey apply to any war of the twentieth century? Or do particular elements that categorise the Spanish Civil War make the study findings unique in terms of family experience? There is certainly much in common with other major conflicts. The behaviour of veterans reported by some family members is identical to that experienced by participants of other wars. These are concerned primarily with the psychological effect on some veterans. Mood swings, inability to discuss engagement subjectively, guilt at the loss of comrades and a desire to be with fellow soldiers. International Brigaders experienced some or all of these characteristics in varying degrees but the majority did display a great desire to discuss Spain objectively through its importance in terms of anti-fascist resistance quite simply because no one else would. Men drafted into Vietnam mirror the sense of betrayal that Brigaders must have felt towards the state, who they believed, contributed to the downfall of the Republic putting them on the losing side to a certain degree. Both groups of veterans experienced the isolation and rejection of their fellow citizens and the state. Within the framework of the civil war this resulted in family members feeling that their parent or partner was different from other war veterans, special in some way. These emotions were not only connected to their

⁷ Personalised questionnaire of Nigel, February 2000.

volunteer status but to the close association with the Communist Party. The main difference between this project and the likely findings of research on the relatives and memory of other conflicts is how their lives have been changed and influenced by politics. For many veterans it was important if not more so to pass on the political message as it was for any other stories of the war to be told.

A final significant area of similarity with other conflict studies involving family members is the human element. Hobsbawm asked why had some experiences become part of a wider historical memory but not many others?⁸ The answer in this case is because it was not thought important. After all this entire project has been about the consequences of a foreign war on a small number of people who did not take part. In spite of this the repercussions on personal relationships, political affiliations, individual conscience and principles has been immense. However the key factor that makes this so different is that the legacy of 'moral superiority,' in essence their relatives' war and its guiding symbols, are morally superior to any other conflict.

Would these conclusions be similar if the project had been able to look in more detail at the family of the Independent Labour Party contingent? None of their relatives were known by International Brigade family members. In fact there was very little archival material on the veterans themselves. Would they have felt isolated from the main group of International Brigaders and family who already feel marginalized themselves from institutional remembrance? It is certain that the project would have looked very different if the relations of Nationalist volunteers had been interviewed. Would in fact any of them have come forward? How they may have felt to have a family member fight on the side seen as morally reprehensible would have been intriguing. Could it have been a memory they were proud of or would they reject it as some International Brigade relatives must have rejected theirs?

Of all the questions that remain unanswered it was those relations of International Brigaders who were not proud or did not want to remember who proved the most illusive. The methodological approach relied on respondents actively participating. Those with little or no interest, or who were too angry or upset to come forward,

⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *On History*, Abacus Books, 1997, p.353.

have been very few. Their stories, along with Independent Labour Party relatives and those of Nationalists are equally important and no doubt as interesting as the family eager to celebrate their unusual heritage.

Finally and most importantly the research has established the role of the family in the history of the Spanish Civil War and the British International Brigade, despite their marginalisation in all processes of remembrance and their influence in creating that memory. It affirms the power of story telling within the family and divulges the existence of a strong political heritage, passed down through the generations.

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File C/2 Timetable of convoy 8 January – 8 February 1939, File C/3 Account of convoy – J. Fuhr.

File D: General International Brigade and IBA Material

File D/4 Bombing in Spain, National Joint Committee, not dated (photocopy), File D/7 Circular letter 23 November 1938 (incomplete), File D/17 Exhibition Bethnal Green 20-23 May 1961 (duplicated leaflet), File D/20 Letters from C. Brunel to N. Green 1965, File D/38 Circular letter from N. Green on Archive 19 August 1974, File D/39 Letter from N. Green on handing over Archive 18 October 1975.

Box A12 – Individuals' Papers and Memoirs.

File Al: James Allbrighton, *File Co:* Jack Coward (A12-Co/1), *File Do:* Harry Dobson (A12-Do/1-4)

Box A14 – 50th Anniversary Material (includes 60th Anniversary)*File A: England – General*

File A/5 Press cutting Guardian 20 October 1986, File A/9a Anniversary in Cambridge 1986, File A/10 Press cuttings 21 June 1986 – 14 March 1987, File A/11 Programme for *Needles of Light*. Play by J. Pettifer February – April 1987, File A/12 *History Today*: articles by Paul Preston and Helen Graham, File A/14 Programme of *Pasionaria*. Play by P. Gems at Newcastle Playhouse February 1985.

¹ 'Boxes' and 'Files' had titles, so both were named.

File B: England –Outside London

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File C: London Area

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File H/3, File H/41a & FileH/42 60th Anniversary Material²

Box B4 – Material on Local Campaigns*File C: Cambridge*

File C/3a-j Letters of F. Knight 1937

Box B8 – Medical Advances, Aid to Franco/Catholic Aid, Post-war Refugees, Dependants' Aid, Misc Material – ILP/POUM.*File H: IBA Dependants' Aid*

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² Files Box A14-H/3, A14-H41a and A14-H/42 have not been entered into the International Brigade Memorial Archive Catalogue Vol. 3 1994.

Box C – Special Files³*File 1: List of Names*

File 1/1 Analysis of International Brigade Files, File 1/3a File on those missing.

File 4: Miscellaneous Correspondence & Memoirs

File 4/2 Letter from J. Peet, Berlin to W. Alexander 18 March 1975.

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File 25: September 1938

File 25/5 Letter: P. Kerrigan to H. Pollitt 27 September 1938

File 26: October – November 1938

File 26/2 Letter: Dependants' Aid to P. Kerrigan 10 October 1938

Box 37 – Documents on IBA Organisation and Development*File A: Foundation and Constitution*

File A/2 Draft Constitution March 1939, File A/6 Associate Membership Application Form.

File B: Working and Executive Committee Papers

File B/9 Decisions of Executive Committee/Financial Statement July 1943

Box 39 – Dependants Aid Committees*File A : Dependants Aid: Leave - Repatriation*

Files A/1 – 36 Correspondence in chronological order:

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³ These contain material deemed sensitive by the IBA and cannot be photocopied.

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(a) South Wales Miners' Library⁴

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APPENDIX ONE**Questionnaire****THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR & MEMORY****Questionnaire****A. ABOUT YOUR RELATIVE WHO TOOK PART IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR****1** What relation are you to the person who went to the Spanish Civil War?

Please tick ✓

Son ☐ Daughter ☐ Brother ☐ Sister ☐
 Cousin ☐ Grandson ☐ Granddaughter ☐ Wife ☐
 Husband ☐ Other, please specify _____

2 How long did your relative stay in Spain during the Spanish Civil War?

Please tick ✓

1 – 2 months ☐ 3 – 6 months ☐ 6 months – 1 year ☐
 1 year – 2 years ☐ Over 2 years ☐ Don't know ☐

3a Do you know what rank they were? Please tick ✓

Yes ☐ No ☐

b. If yes, please specify _____**c.** Where did they serve? _____

d. Were they injured? Yes ☐ No ☐
 Killed in action? Yes ☐ No ☐
 Missing? Yes ☐ No ☐
 Came back home? Yes ☐ No ☐

4a ✓ What was their occupation/status in Britain before the Civil War? Please tick

Unemployed ☐ Employed ☐ Please specify occupation _____

Don't know ☐

b. Age at time of going to Spain? _____

c. Occupation after the war? (if applicable) _____

5 How did your relative express him/herself about their Spanish Civil War experience?
Please tick ✓

Never talked about it ☐

Talked only when asked ☐

Occasionally ☐

Often ☐

Was/is active in IBA* ☐

Please feel free to comment further _____

*International Brigade Association

6a Did your relative take an active part in World War 2?

Yes ☐ No ☐

b. If yes, were they decorated? _____

B. ABOUT YOURSELFPersonal Details

Age: _____ Profession: _____

Marital

Status: _____ Children: _____

How would you describe the area where you live? ie. *city, town, village, housing estate*7a Do you collect materials/memorabilia on the Spanish Civil War / International Brigades? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please specify _____

b. Are you involved or active in association connected with the Spanish Civil War / International Brigades? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please give details _____

8 How did you learn about the involvement of your relative? _____

9 How would you sum up the action/involvement of your elative in the International Brigades? You may tick more than one choice or add your own.

Brave ☐ Normal ☐ Heroic ☐ Misguided ☐
 Necessary ☐ Incredible ☐ Foolhardy ☐

10a Have you been to Spain to visit the place(s) where your relative fought/was stationed?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, answer Question 10b. If no, answer Question 10c.

b. Do you have any contacts with local person(s) in Spain? Yes ☐ No ☐

c. Do you have any plans to visit place(s) where your relative was active?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please give details _____

11 Have you been actively involved in any political movements? Yes ☐ No ☐
 If yes, please tick which one(s)

Trade Unions ☐ _____
 Pressure Groups ☐ _____
 Demonstrations ☐ _____
 Other, please specify _____

12 Have you ever written/contributed to any work (books/films etc.) on the Spanish Civil War / International Brigades?

No ☐ Yes ☐ Please specify _____

C THE MEMORY OF THE WAR

13a Do you have any materials/memorabilia remembering the Spanish Civil War, passed onto you by your relative? Please tick ✓

	<u>In English</u>	<u>In Spanish</u>	<u>Other Languages</u>
Diaries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newspaper Articles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Photos <input type="checkbox"/>			
Memoirs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medals <input type="checkbox"/>			
Posters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political Pamphlets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Books	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

b. How/Why did you acquire them? _____

14 Have you seen/read any of the following works on the Spanish Civil War? Please indicate with a tick. ✓

George Orwell ☐ Ernest Hemingway ☐ Laurie Lee ☐

Other Spanish Civil War memoirs ☐ _____

Land & Freedom ☐

Any comments on them?

15a Do you visit Spanish Civil War memorials? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please give further details _____

b. Is there a memorial near where you live? Yes ☐ No ☐

D. THE MEMORY OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR IN YOUR LIFE

16 How would you describe the place of the Spanish Civil War and the International Brigade in British History?

17 How much of the Spanish Civil War do you consider is still alive?

18 How would you propose to develop or keep the memory of the war still alive?

Please indicate your feelings on the following statements. (Questions 19 – 21)

19 It has been an important recognition of the role/importance of the International Brigades by giving them Spanish Citizenship. Please tick ✓ preference.

Strongly Disagree ☐
 Disagree ☐
 Agree ☐
 Strongly Agree ☐
 No Opinion ☐

20 There should be a special Remembrance Day set aside for the Spanish Civil War in this country. Please tick ✓ preference.

Strongly Disagree ☐
 Disagree ☐
 Agree ☐
 Strongly Agree ☐
 No Opinion ☐

21 It is essential to keep alive the memory of the veterans inside the families. Please tick ✓ preference.

Strongly Disagree ☐
 Disagree ☐
 Agree ☐
 Strongly Disagree ☐
 No Opinion ☐

Would you agree to further contact, in the form of a more personalised questionnaire or interview with my self? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, please write your contact details below.

Any information will be kept strictly anonymous.

Thank-you very much for completing this questionnaire.

NS Contact details

APPENDIX TWO

Family Interview

Daughter: I only know what I know from my father. But I don't know what my brother knows from him. I don't know what he told him and what must be different from what he told him and what he told me.

Interviewer: Did you not talk to each other about it then?

Daughter: No

Son: No. Well there's quite a big age difference between us. I mean that would have affected things anyway.

Interviewer: I was quite interested in what you put on your questionnaire that you were quite envious of Spain until you went there.

Wife: It was almost as though it was somebody I was jealous of. Spain.

Interviewer: Why did it become clear since you'd been there?

Wife: It was like as if it was (*pause*) a tremendous and constant rival for Harry's affections or I thought so but perhaps in many ways I thought no big deal (*series of pauses*) but when we first went in actual fact was when we went over that...

Daughter: When we went back first that was during the Franco era wasn't it?

Wife: That's right. It was. Now I was very torn at that time. I wanted to go to Russia to see my friend.

Daughter: Oh no I didn't know that.

Wife: But there was this overwhelming thing that I wanted to lay this ghost that haunted me all the time. This ghost that was Spain. So despite the fact that I should have preferred to go to Russia to see someone who I'd known as a refugee during the war, we'd been in a government training camp together. (*Edit*) I mean there were certain things that were attractive about Spain but also I always have been, it wasn't specifically Spain, it could have been anywhere under the same sort of circumstances because it was Spain and very much linked with Spain that supposing for instance the same sort of thing had been happening in Norway, Holland, anywhere, (*pause*) I've often questioned whether it would have got volunteers but also there was a very strong emotional feeling that I think was linked up too with the emotional attitudes of English people for a long time towards (*pause*) Mediterranean countries right from the time of Byron. So I'm not trying to denigrate the political at all but I think there

was also this romantic element in it, which made Spain much stronger than if it had been Holland. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: So it laid the ghost to rest when you went then did it?

Wife: Yes I think so and then of course (*pause*) later getting involved with other Brigaders. We weren't linked up with Brigaders then not when we went (**Daughter:** No, I don't remember anything to do with Brigaders at that time) That's right but it was only sort of in its infancy, the sporadic part of that group organising, it hadn't reached out to other Brigaders, the organisation at that time.

Daughter: The first I remember of Brigade Association commemoration events was sort of in the mid/late 60's? (*Long pause*)

Wife: Yes that was the earliest time.

Daughter: Yes? So I remember going along to some events then. I went to one with [Dad] there but I don't remember if you were there or not? (*Long pause*) I don't remember every one but there was a family do playing at the commemoration and I think that was the first one I went to, maybe about 69/70. (*Pause*) So I think that was probably the early days of the real sort of (*pause*) big annual events but I think they were more than annual at that time weren't they? There were events going on?

Wife: Yes there were odd things going on. I mean the memorial in Jubilee Gardens hadn't been erected then. So there wasn't that sort of central presence. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: Did you talk about it a lot as a family?

Daughter: No, no, I don't think we talked about it all that much as a family.

Wife: I don't think so. I mean now and again [veteran] would come out with some particular bit of reminiscence.

Daughter: Oh yes. How I remember it was that [Dad] would direct things about Spain to other members of the family but it wasn't discussed by us as a family, we didn't discuss sort of what had gone on in Spain.

Son: He wasn't that great at discussing things anyway.

Daughter: He'd talk at you rather than to you. (**Wife:** That's right.)

Son: He'd give lectures. It's quite fascinating just my recollection is quite divergent from yours.

Daughter: But you don't know what my recollection is because I haven't said anything yet.

Son: No, no you have, you've talked about...

Daughter: Go on please tell us what your recollection is.

Son: a) That it wasn't something that was discussed in the family at all and I don't think [Dad] ever spoke to me about it on my own.

Daughter: That's interesting.

Interviewer: So can I ask what the age difference is?

Daughter: Nearly seven years.

Son: Whether basically he'd told you or he needed to tell somebody about it. The only time I can remember him speaking about it other than recently was I think when he was talking to you about it.

Daughter: How interesting. You were there as a bystander while he was talking to me. How interesting. (*Long pause*) Because I wanted to know that. I didn't know whether he'd ever taken you to one side and told you about Spain. (**Son:** No) How interesting. Well my father first spoke to me about Spain when I was 15. It must have been, 'well she's old enough for me now to talk about Spain to.' And he told me a huge amount.

Interviewer: Lecture at you?

Daughter: That's right, that's what it was like. He did this periodically to me. (*Edit*) At the time you were expected to sit down and listen, absolutely completely focused, you know eye contact, listening. You had to give your undivided attention and then he would give you this lecture about things. But anyway so I don't know how long he was talking to me about Spain when I was 15 but it must have been a considerable time, a couple of hours maybe. And he told me lots and I never knew any of that. I knew he'd been to Spain. I picked up the fact that he'd been to Spain; he'd fought in the Spanish Civil War because we'd been a couple of years before that. We'd been on holiday to Spain and I knew that Franco was in power and Franco was a dictator. (*Edit*) So I knew a little bit about it but I don't know anything about my father's role in it other than that he'd been there. And so he told me all about this and I was immensely proud I really was. I went into school. I was telling all my friends and I think I might have told a teacher or two who I liked and people like this you know and it made a big impression on me indeed, really big impression on me but then (*pause*) I went through this very strange phrase where I wasn't worthy to be alive

because my father's best friend had been killed in Spain (*pause*) and it wasn't until a few years ago as I was driving back from Brighton, 'but SP died years before you were born.'

Interviewer: Why do you think you felt like that?

Wife: He'd got a lot of qualifications. He'd worked very hard. So we heard a great deal about him.

Daughter: We heard a lot about SP. My father obviously looked up to him and physically too because he was tall and my father was short and he'd been to either Cambridge or Oxford very much under his own steam and that's pretty unique, people did not, especially to Oxford or Cambridge at that time and he'd got a very good degree. (*Edit*) Anyway, they obviously hit it off a great deal. My father really admired SP thought he was the bee's knees and then they both (*pause*) got taken off to hospital for different reasons. (*Edit*) Anyway I can't remember what happened but SP signed himself out early and had gone back to the front and when my father got back to the front he was told SP had been killed. (*Long pause*)

Interviewer: And he told you all that?

Daughter: That's right. Oh yes in immense detail. I mean the detail was amazing. The only thing I can conclude is that my father felt guilty that SP had been killed. (**Wife:** That's because he'd been killed and he hadn't) and he had off-loaded some of the guilt on me so I felt, 'why am I alive and SP's dead.'

Wife: I didn't realise. It was only a short time ago that you told me that you felt like this. The things you don't know about the nearest people in a *family*.

Daughter: This is a very common reaction when people survive, Holocaust survivors, refugees that have survived. I mean it's a very, very common psychological reaction to think why did I survive when others didn't.

Interviewer: But you felt it?

Daughter: Yeah exactly and I thought I'll never be as clever as SP. Why is he dead and I'm not? Absolutely dreadful.

Interviewer: All those years.

Daughter: Yes. And how ridiculous only a few years ago realising the complete irrationality. It never occurred to me. I mean there I was leading what I thought was a

fairly sane existence but I hadn't realised in the middle of this sort of nub of complete irrationality that I'd never actually come to grips with.

Interviewer: And so...?

Daughter: That was a very profound affect on me in many ways and that would just be one of them (*long pause*).

Interviewer: And your experience was completely different wasn't it?

Son: Um.

Daughter: Because you were a bystander. I was the person all this was being focused on.

Son: Well yes that's right. So what I picked up was only little snippets and because it was one of these things that wasn't discussed in the family and therefore I think it was something that felt at the time wasn't discussed outside of the family either certainly something that wasn't spread about. It wasn't necessarily something to be ashamed of but it wasn't something to be discussed out side. I've learnt an awful lot since [Dad] died, about Spain, about him in Spain and things that happened.

Interviewer: So you didn't really talk about it then?

Son: No.

Interviewer: Do you think he wanted you to pass it on or...?

Daughter: I don't know. (*Pause*) I don't know. (*Pause*) It's a good question. (*Long pause*) It's a very good question (*pause*). I don't know the answer to that. I don't know whether he would. I don't know whether he wanted me to do anything about it other than be a repository for it, I really don't know. (*Pause*) I think he wanted me to be interested in it and I think he wanted me to be aware about it but once again it wasn't something that you know if you came up with a slightly contrary view he didn't want to hear that. So it wasn't something he wanted to enter into dialogue with me. He wasn't that sort of person anyway. He wasn't a person that discussed things. You might actually have a point there. (*Edit*) I also think there was an awful amount of emotional backlog that he wouldn't have wanted to admit to himself and I don't think he'd admit to a lot of it. (*Edit*) One of the things he did talk about which interests me because a lot of the other children of Brigaders didn't know this side of things but people for example where their father was quite high up, a Commissar or something like this they tended to give them the public face of the International

Brigades. So for example people like Dora and Mark they only learnt that that was the sort of thing that their father told them like, 'oh yes we went over the top at Teruel or something like this and there was so many of us and we did this and that.' (Pause) Dora told me that she didn't realise the terrible suffering that they went through until she read Fred's book, 'but Dora I've always known these things.' Because another thing that really impressed me was that when they were leaving Spain and they were in an awful state and they had no food and had something like 3 days with no food and it was extremely cold. Most of the time he was fighting in Spain the winters were shockingly cold, mainly on the Aragon front and [Dad] was fantasising about food and they were talking about their favourite food and nobody did anything but talk about food for the whole time because they were so hungry. Another thing that stuck in my mind (*edit*) he was climbing up some pretty rough terrain up a hillside and he turned round to call the man who was following him, he said, 'come on why don't you?' and this man he said he was just like this and he must have just had a bullet through his brain, he was actually dead and he was falling over when my father turned round. 'Come on hurry up,' and he just had this vacant look, Spanish, and he was just fast dropped dead.

Interviewer: And he told you that?

Daughter: Yes.

Interviewer: When you were 15?

Daughter: Um. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: And did you get things in such detail?

Wife: Yes I got a lot of detail but in a way it was with me a bit like (*pause*) overkill. I'd had so much (*long pause*) Yes you see my feelings from the beginning were (*long pause*) they were very mixed (*long pause*) from a personal side I suppose he was so much older than me (*long pause*) I was sort of proud that he liked to go with me (*pause*) I don't know (*pause*) as I say I did find a feeling of jealousy (*pause*) as though I'd heard so much about Spain (*pause*) that I was very complex in my feelings (*long pause*) yes (*pause*) but he started very late on, it was only a year or so back that he started really talking about this cook and I remember wanting to know more about him and other individuals, people, but as you say that was the thing about Fred's book, people and the reality came across. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: So what about your own children, how have you...?

Daughter: I've got one son. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: So how have you transferred the memory onto him?

Daughter: I think he's been around a lot when my father's been talking to him. He would probably have somewhat similar recollections to [brother]. He may very well have been, [Dad] may very well have chatted to [son] about Spain when I haven't been there and he's been there with my parents so I think he may have actually got a bit of first-hand knowledge about it. (*Edit*) as well as hearing [Dad] tell me things about Spain (*long pause*). He was saying to me, 'I would like to know a lot more about the Spanish Civil War.' (*Pause*) There's plenty of books he can read (*laughs*). (*Edit*)

Interviewer: I wanted to include what the families thought about texts such as Orwell that have bothered people and Land & Freedom of course.

Daughter: Well when I saw Land & Freedom I took out of it messages that clearly Ken Loach didn't intend at all, at least in my opinion. You presumably know the film quite well, the young American speaks at the debate on whether to take more land into common ownership etc. and he says, 'look there's a war on, we really need to be organising ourselves to fight Franco, we can't spend any time trying to reorganise farming because we need to organise the fight.' I was just completely on his side. Yes he's got the right line absolutely. Clearly that was not what Ken Loach wanted people to get. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: I was very interested to know if anyone's outlook had changed? Had they been influenced by what they'd seen or read or anyone they'd met?

Daughter: No I wouldn't say my view of the Spanish Civil War had changed from the sort of view of the Spanish Civil War that my father wanted to convey to me. I don't think there's anything I've read or people I've spoken to have markedly changed my opinion about the Spanish Civil War from the conflict that he was clearly trying to put across to me. So no I don't think so. I mean all these things are very interesting and they fill out the picture for me but I don't think there's anything else that profoundly influenced or changed or said, 'oh no that's rubbish, why did my father go to fight in Spain, that's a complete waste of time, people died for nothing.'

I mean nothing has ever made me feel in any way any of that was the case. Everything I've read, people I've talked to very much reinforce the picture. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: And didn't you say you'd written a poem? [To Wife]

Daughter: Oh it's a wonderful poem I think.

Wife: His grandson read it out at [veteran's] funeral.

Interviewer: So what made you write that?

Wife: Well I've always written poetry anyway since I was a child. I haven't really written about the Brigaders since this last year. I think it was perhaps because [husband] couldn't go to the big reunion for the first time you see. Oh we got there for the major one [Homanaje].

Daughter: We didn't think we would I mean honestly [Dad] had been so ill.

Interviewer: So what was that like?

Wife: Oh it was wonderful, (*edit*) we'd been before to Spain on other trips (*edit*), 81 trip of course, that was the first time I'd met up with many of the Brigaders, although of course [husband] knew Fred before. (*Edit*) I'd never met up with [Fred's wife] or Fred until then. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: But they weren't in touch until 81?

Wife: No.

Interviewer: So how did that feel meeting all the other wives?

Wife: It was as though I was not quite sure of my role (*pause*). I quickly became friends with Fred and [Fred's wife}. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: You weren't sure about your role you said?

Wife: Yes. I felt (*long pause*) (**Daughter:** Did you feel sort of superfluous?) I felt different. I know why I felt different because I was pursuing my own life as well (*edit*) I went to Sussex University to get my degree, which I got in '77. (*Edit*) By '81 of course (*pause*) I was working for the Open University teaching. (*Edit*) So it seemed to me like I was running a very different course than the other women were. (*Edit*) None of the others were doing any paid work, they'd all retired. I was the other way round see. So that's why I wasn't sure of my role. (*Edit*) Some of these things I haven't thought through clearly myself. (*Edit*).

Interviewer: (*edit*) Sometimes you don't get the opportunity to sit down and talk to your family.

Son: We have latterly because we've been provoked into it by [Dad's] death. So yes I think before it was just one of things you don't talk about because you think you're expected to know all ready, (**Wife:** Yes.) that kind of feeling, unless there's something to provoke it. (*Long pause*)

Interviewer: I think it's interesting that between the two of you, one didn't...(Daughter:...know what the other one knew. And I certainly didn't know how my mother felt. I can quite understand why.)

Wife: I think quite a number of women about the Second World War must have had the same feeling about their husbands' experiences in war. Of course in the Second World War many women had many different kinds of related experiences (*pause*). It always seems to loom so very high and for so long any war experiences with men because it's associated often with their youth and of course it's this balancing act between life and death.

Daughter: It's an experience, which is indelible really. It makes an enormous impact on them, certainly on [Dad] hadn't it?

Wife: Yes.

(*Edit*)

APPENDIX THREE

An interview with the son of a volunteer killed in Spain.

Interviewer: Your father was politically active?

Son: Yes.

Interviewer: As well as Spain he went on three Hunger Marches didn't he?

Son: Yes. I've letters around somewhere that he wrote when he was on the Hunger Marches but he wrote some on the way, they were posted, one or two that he posted when he was in London. In one of them he told my mother that, 'if you think of me at twelve o'clock midday I will be standing in the House of Commons under Big Ben,' and that was back in 1934.

Interviewer: Was he away a lot?

Son: If there was a march and they wanted somebody on the march my father would go because in the area near Nantgawr and the Maesteg Valley and up in various parts of the Rhondda quite a few people were black-listed for union activity and they wouldn't allow them in any of the pits at all. So if there was anything going he was there. He wasn't a Communist he was Labour. *(Edit)* Quite a few of the people who went to Spain were Communist out-and-out but he wouldn't have it, he said, 'I'm Labour and Labour always.'

Interviewer: So what was family life like if he was away a lot?

Son: Well my mother was the head of the house.

Interviewer: What did she think to it all?

Son: Well my mother was a Communist. She was well in with all the local Communist Party people throughout Wales. She knew most of them and quite a lot of them come to the house. *(Edit)* This is a photo of my father when he was a younger man before he went to Spain. That one has come from Spain, that's the uniform there. He was down *(pause)* or just the fact that it was his beliefs, I don't know, I was nine when he went and just gone ten. He went to one of the big hotels named Florida for a couple of days leave. He sent this back to show my mother the buildings and the hotels that were there and it cost 33 pesetas for two nights.

Interviewer: So he must have wrote a lot?

Son: Well we haven't got many letters I'll be honest with you. The bulk of them were destroyed. My father was in the Territorials for a short period. He didn't believe

in violence but even though he didn't believe in it, he still went and fought. (*Edit*) You did say over the telephone why nothing much was done by our family. After my father died we eventually got the information; for some reason or other they just seemed to lose interest in the family. Nobody bothered with us.

Interviewer: This was the Party?

Son: Yes. [*Shows interviewer Dependant's Aid letter*]

Interviewer: That's 1939. How many months did you have to wait?

Son: We were told eventually that he was killed in 1937 in Brunete in July. We had to wait that time. I only found all these when we were clearing out the house after my mother died. She never bothered much about it afterwards. According to her the very people that helped my father to go never bothered much with the family after we had found that he'd died. There is the death certificate from the Spanish government. It's all in Spanish. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: So did you get that one with the Dependents' Aid letter?

Son: No, they eventually found out after my mother kept pestering them. I think they got fed up of her chasing them to find out what had happened because unless my mother could get positive proof of his death there was several things in those days that she couldn't have. The Parish used to give her 17 and 6 a week and the government wanted proof that my father had actually died, killed in Spain, before they would help her anymore. I think it eventually went up to 21s but then you would get people coming round the house every two weeks inspecting and checking the house to see if you have things that in their opinion you didn't need. Like when my father was alive we had a radio with wet batteries at the back on the window sill; now you'd pay six pence a week, a man would come and he would check that the batteries were all right. Now the fella came from the Parish, 'you don't need that,' out, and he would go through the house and you couldn't stop he would go through the bedrooms everything. (*Edit*) It wasn't a necessity it was a luxury.

Interviewer: So did you get anything from the Dependents' Aid?

Son: The only money we had was from the Spanish government and they gave you a hundred pounds for each child if the husband was killed, nothing else.

Interviewer: Did you get anything off them [*Dependents' Aid*]?

Son: No. (*Edit*) The leader of the Communist Party in Ogmores Vale at the time was a County Councillor by the name of NM. If there were ever any meetings my mother used to go to them and I went to some of them to prime the stove to make the tea. I was nine, ten years old. I used to carry the primus stove with my mother, tea, milk.

Interviewer: Did you used to go on to meetings and things?

Son: Yes. I would light the primus stove and have the kettle on to boil by the time they were ready for their tea. Now if my sister was here I'd have to put my sister in the bedroom and shut her there because she goes berserk. NM, when my father went Ogmores Vale to London they had to go in the middle of the night because the police had orders and powers to stop them. They were not allowed to go. So they were taken from Ogmores Vale to Bridgend or Cardiff in the middle of the night; put on the train and met at Paddington, taken to what was considered a safe house, from there then they would be taken by boat to Dover, from Dover to France and they were smuggled through France to the borders of Spain and smuggled over the Pyrenees to join up because the British Government and the French Government had an agreement. Now NM's brother went to London but when she found out she sent a car for him, picked him up and brought him back. He was not going to go to fight in Spain. Anybody else could go but her brother couldn't go. So my sister would have to be locked in the bedroom if she heard anything about NM. I don't know if you can read this? That date's July 1st 1937, it's only in pencil, read that, he turned round and he was nearly company runner.

Interviewer: [*Reading letter*] ...our leave is over we are (pause) [**Son:** My father wasn't all that well educated mind] *we don't know when we are going back to the front. Dear, if anything do happen to me don't take it too hard. I know your heart is with me, you know anything can happen in war. You have your life to live and the children to live for. I am trying to keep my promise. I have been to Madrid to buy for the ?? again. Dear I am alright and feeling OK and my spirits are on the upgrade. We put it to Pollitt about leave home and he's going to see the Spanish government. Dear I am glad to hear that you and the children are alright, you keep your spirits up, give my regards to all at 24/28 and all of Ogmores for me. My love to you and the children. So long my dear, love ____.*

Son: Now these are the only ones I was able to save. Now this one was written on the 5th July and this was written before they went into battle. That was the last letter.

Interviewer: *[reading letter] ...here I am alright and keeping fit and I hope you the same and all at 24. We are in reserve about 7 kilometres from the front. We will go into attack any time now. I am a second company runner...the heat is terrific and the flies unbearable. This is a tough job out here. I am not sorry I came to fight the fascists. Here I scratch it out the reason we are at war. Well, dear here we go this time into a big fight with superior equipment and troops we will crush the fascists this time. This is a big new offensive I hope we will smack them and be victorious. No I have not had a letter from NM. [Son: My mother wrote to my father saying that she was getting no help from NM and any others now that he had gone and he said that he'd written to her but he hadn't had a letter back from her.] Tell Rhys not to worry about it. Well so long dear for a time I hope to have the luck to see the job through. Dear you are in my constant thought throughout the fight. Love ____.*

Son: That was written on the 5th of the 7th and then I think they went into battle about the 11th. Only what I was told *(long pause)* we were in Ammanford; they went to Ammanford because they were putting up a plaque in Ammanford, with my brother and we met a man there and he said that the first and second company had been more or less obliterated with the German and Italian troops. He said they were getting wounded out in ambulances and as the ambulances were driving away all the German artillery plastered the area. He said even though the ambulances were there with the red cross they still showered them. *[Produces photographs]* That's my father with my sister, there's his younger brother and that's outside my grandmother's house in Ogmore Vale.

Interviewer: What did they think to him going?

Son: This brother here was in the Army and in India and when he heard about it he said he was a bloody fool. Well this one here said, 'well if he believes in it that much, go.' *(Edit)*

Interviewer: So what did your mother think to it all?

Son: In some ways she didn't want him to go. Mind you she fully expected him to come back. He was 32 when he went; it was just after his 33rd birthday when he died. But she thought he'd come back but it didn't happen that way. She said, 'right he's definitely made up his mind, well you want to go,' and all the arrangements had been made with NM and all the Communist Party people and Labour Party people up the valley and if he did go that my mother and us children would be taken care of and looked after and he went.

Interviewer: And you weren't.

Son: Well they forgot about it.

Interviewer: So the night he went your mother told you he was going?

Son: He went at twelve o'clock and we were awake. My sister saw him with my Mother. She's three years older than me. She went downstairs. (*Edit*)

Interviewer: Did you understand why he was going?

Son: Not so much in those days. My mother had told us that he was going to fight men that were not nice and that men were imprisoning other people and that he was going to help other people sort them out and that was it. But many a time have I saw my mother crying her eyes out, didn't know what to do next as far as money was concerned, rent to be paid, food, clothing, that sort of stuff. It's all memories, it's all in the past now. We eventually moved to Bridgend but we were never going to work underground. That was definitely out. I don't think anybody visited the family then from the Communist Party. Not even NM who was supposed to be such a big friend, FC, the ____, they were all Party members and councillors but NM was our local councillor, I think she tried to become an MP but she was one of the big noises in the valley but she could have helped my mother out a lot more. As he was the only one that went from the valley, there was no one else from the valley that went. He was the only one in that area.

Interviewer: There was a memorial ceremony for him in 1938?

Son: Yes they had one in the Hall in Ogmore Vale.

Interviewer: Did you go?

Son: Yes we were there as children. My mother, my father's mother was there, my grandmother on my mother's side. They were all there the Hall was full. We had the

Silver Band, everybody was there making big speeches and all the rest of it. That was about the lot.

Interviewer: But nothing to help the family?

Son: No. If it wasn't for the fact that my grandfather was working in the colliery and helping my mother out I don't know what would have happened. They would have more than likely split the family up and that would have been that.

Interviewer: So you've got a brother and sister. How do they feel about it all?

Son: My brother was only seven years old. I told him that you would be coming. In his opinion he said, 'well, what Dad believed in but perhaps it would have been better if he'd thought of his family, instead of everybody else. And what he believed in he should have believed in the family more, he should have stayed home, leave them to sort it out themselves.

Interviewer: What about your sister?

Son: My sister said he should have stayed. 'He was fighting for a good cause,' she said. She'll admit to that but then again in her opinion, governments of the rest of the world should have got together and stopped it. Her opinion now is that he was daft but if nobody stands up to bullies then the bullies will always rule.

Interviewer: It's a difficult situation.

Son: It is a difficult situation. I don't know what I would do. I would more than likely turn round and say, 'well go on fight it out between yourselves.' (*Edit*)

Interviewer: So what about your own children, what do they think?

Son: Well I tell my children about it and they ask all sorts of questions and they turn round and say, 'well, why did he go?' That was the one thing I was always asked. 'Why (*pause*) when he had three children of his own? Why did he go knowing he could be killed?' I said, 'well there's only one answer I can give you; it was his belief that everybody should fight for freedom.' (*Edit*) [*Showing a photograph of his father in uniform in Spain. A professionally taken shot in Madrid. He has his hand in a bandage.*] My mother wrote to him wanting to know what that was. 'Oh,' he said, 'shrapnel.'

Interviewer: So presumably this was taken in Madrid when he was on leave?

Son: Yes. The only time he said in one of the bits and pieces of letters and information that I did get out of my mother was that if they had a bit of leave and

they went to Madrid or any one of the big cities, quite a lot of them used to try and get photographs taken or pick up souvenirs that they could send home. My sister had a silk handkerchief sent to her; my brother had a peseta sent to him that came through the post all right. We had another letter come a few months later, in the letter it said, 'one peseta for [*himself*]' and there was no peseta in there but the bottom of the letter had been split open, so somebody had nicked it. So my mother turns round to me and said [*gets book*], 'you can have this.' It's written by William Rust. My mother bought the book. It was written by William Rust, he was the war correspondent for the Daily Worker. So he wrote the book and it's all about the fights, at the very beginning, the battle of Jarama, Prisoners of Franco, here we are, the British at Brunete and that was one of the big battles of 1937. Now there he is. [*Points to picture of his father*] So that's him. There's Pollitt. Now a few of the officers of the Battalion came to Ogmore Vale to my mother's house. They stayed the night. (*Edit*) My mother bought this book after the war had finished because she wanted to read about it. Now this is the memorial that was done in Ogmore Vale. [*Shows memorial programme*]

Interviewer: Do you remember all this?

Son: Oh yes. I knew quite a few of those people. It was in 1938 when they had the memorial service, all these people came down there, there was very little help given to my mother at all. The fact that she made a perishing nuisance of herself that she got any help to find out what happened. (*Edit*) They wanted to know why she'd finished with them.

Interviewer: So she came out of the Communist Party?

Son: Oh yes she packed it in. She said, 'no, you lot are only in it for what you seem to be getting out of it.' (*Edit*) Course there were all the big noises from the unions, the AEU, Miners' Federation, all the top dogs of the different unions, Paul Robeson was out there, singing to the troops. (*Edit*) In the book there's quite a few officers of the Brigade in Spain, Fred Copeman, Llewellyn, quite a few of them came to the house later on they said they would help if they could?

Interviewer: This was after your father died?

Son: Well Copeman came when the war was on because he had leave. I think he'd been wounded and he'd been brought back home. Then again he went back out there.

He was a big fella; I can remember him being there. Sandals on and he sat on the settee; he must have been about six foot tall, six foot two. He was huge. *(Edit)* I think if he'd been up the Rhondda as Harold was saying there would have been done because I think they helped their people more up there. More of the valley was communistic in their beliefs, they done more for each other. I think my mother was quite bitter about it. All the promises that NM made and the fact that they were supposed to be such great friends and nought come of it. *(Edit)* We're proud of him there's no arguments there but as my brother turned round and said, 'was he right in going at his age?' He was 32. 'Would it be better if left to younger people without families?' Trouble is if everybody thought the same thing Hitler and Mussolini would still be ruling the world. My father didn't believe that those types of people should be allowed to rule the world. *(Edit)*

Interviewer: So was it quite a political place?

Son: It was quite political. You had the Communist Party that was quite strong. The Labour Party was quite strong in the valley. It was all according to what side you believed in as to what you done. My father was Labour and he would go on the Hunger Marches. He would go on any march if he thought it would do some good.

APPENDIX FOUR

Comparative Table of Veterans' and Relatives' Professions

Veteran Profession Before Civil War	Veteran Profession After Civil War	Relationship to Veteran	Relatives' Profession
Unemployed	Miner	Son	Carer
Clerk	Local Government Officer	Daughter	Psychotherapist
Trade Union Rep.	Local Government Officer	Son	Social Worker
Don't know**	Don't know	Daughter	Lecturer
Unemployed	School Truancy Officer	Son	Retired – unknown
Professional**	Various Professions	Son	Local Government Officer
Trainee Chartered Accountant	Chartered Accountant	Daughter	Self-Employed Printer
Student	Accountant	Daughter	Self-Employed
Foundry Worker	Brass Moulder	Son	Booking Agent
Royal Navy	Steel Erector	Son	Lecturer – Retired
Unemployed Miner	Died soon after returning	Son	Lecturer – Retired
Unemployed Miner	Killed in Spain	Son	Painter and Decorator
Unemployed Miner	Manager of Workman's Hall	Grandson	Deputy Head Teacher
Electrician	Electrician	Daughter	Teacher
Swimming Pool Attendant	Radar Inspection (During WW2)	Wife	Lecturer - Retired
Father- Musician Mother - Secretary	Killed in Spain Secretary/Translator	Son	Freelance Writer

Lecturer	Lecturer	Wife	Retired– housewife
Unemployed Miner	Miners' Agent	Brother	Building Control Officer – Retired
Unemployed Miner	Killed in Spain	Brother	BusDriver- Retired
Veteran Profession Before Civil War	Veteran Profession After Civil War	Relationship to Veteran	Relatives' Profession
Nurse	Nurse	Daughter	Teacher/Local Counsellor
Nurse	Nurse	Husband	Architect
Left blank Activist	Teacher Killed in Spain	Wife* Sister*	School Assistant - Retired
Surgeon	GP	Granddaughter	Midwife
Surgeon	GP	Son	Doctor - Retired
Journalist	Teacher	Niece	Lecturer
Fisherman	Killed in Spain	Nephew	Retired - unknown
Unemployed	Killed in Spain	Sister	Retired – unknown
Unemployed	Killed in Spain	Niece	Retired - unknown
Caterer	Carpenter	Daughter	Lecturer – Retired
Catering	Catering	Son	Academic Lawyer
Furniture Sales	Self –Employed Director	Wife	Company Director
Don't know	Sales Jobs	Daughter	Company Director
Don't know	Marker Trader	Son	Company Director
Driver	Driver	Wife	Retired – unknown
Doctor	Doctor	Son	Doctor and Academic
Doctor	Doctor	Son	Film Director
Doctor	Pathologist	Brother	Retired – unknown

*Same Person. **Indicated on Questionnaire that not aware.

Shaded Areas indicate same family.

APPENDIX FIVE

Political Background of Relatives

Relationship to Veteran	Code	Veterans' Affiliation ¹	Veteran was/is active in IBA	How often veteran spoke about Spain ²	Relatives' Trade Union Activity	Relatives' Demonstrations Activity	Relatives' Pressure Group Activity	Relatives' Political Affiliation when growing up	Relatives' Political Affiliation Adulthood	Notes
Son	Stephen	Communist		Occasionally	None	None	None			
Daughter	Rhea	Communist		Occasionally	✓	✓	✓	N/K ³	N/K	Now lives in Canada
Son	Jimmy	Communist	Yes	Only when asked	✓	✓		N/K	N/K	
Daughter	EEq	Communist		Occasionally	None	None	None	N/K	N/K	
Son	Edgar		Yes	Only when asked	✓	✓		N/K	N/K	Not interviewed
Son	Nigel	Communist	Yes	Often		✓	✓	N/K	Issues	
Son	Neil	Communist	Yes	Occasionally	✓	✓	✓	N/K	N/K	
Daughter	HHq	Communist		Occasionally	None	None	None	N/K	N/K	
Son	Joe	Communist		Occasionally		✓	✓	YCL	New CP	
Son	Gwyn	Communist	N/A	Often	✓	✓	✓	N/K	N/K	Father died shortly after returning from Spain
Son	Owen	Labour Party	N/A	N/A	None	None	None	None	None	Father killed in Spain
Grandson	Ray	Communist	Yes	Often	✓			N/K	N/K	
Niece	Ellen	Communist	Yes	Often	✓	✓	✓	N/K	N/K	
Wife	Martha	Communist	Yes	Occasionally		✓	✓	N/K	N/K	

¹ Source for information either volunteered on questionnaire or at interview and other sources.

² Source for information from Question 5 of questionnaire.

³ N/K indicates that information was not volunteered by respondent on either questionnaire or at interview.

Relationship to Veteran	Code	Veterans' Affiliation	Veteran was/is active in IBA	How often veteran spoke about Spain	Relatives' Trade Union Activity	Relatives' Demonstrations Activity	Relatives' Pressure Group Activity	Relatives' Political Affiliation when growing up	Relatives' Political Affiliation Adulthood	Notes
Daughter	Dora	Communist	Yes	Often	✓	✓		YCL/CP	CP/New CP	
Wife	Kitty	Communist	Yes	Often		✓	✓	YCL/CP	CP, Labour Party	
Daughter	Pam	Communist	Yes	Often	✓	✓	✓	YCL/CP	CP/New CP	
Son	Paul	Communist		Never	None	None	None	N/K	N/K	From family interview. No questionnaire
Brother	Arnold	Communist	N/A	N/A			✓	N/K	N/K	Brother killed in Spain
Son	Mark	Communist	Yes	Often	None	None	None	None	None	Both parents were in Spain.
Son	Mark	Communist	N/A	N/A	None	None	None	None	None	Father killed in Spain
Brother	Rhodri	ILP		Never	✓	✓		N/K	Labour Party	Influenced by own engagement in WW2
Husband	Alfred	Communist	Yes	Occasionally	✓	✓	✓	None	CP	
Daughter	Lydia	Communist	Yes	Often	✓	✓	✓	N/K	Labour Party	
Sister	Susie	YCL	N/A	N/A	✓	✓		CP	CP	Brother killed in Spain
Wife	Susie	Labour Party	Yes	Occasionally	✓	✓		CP	CP	Husband also in Spain
Son	James	Communist		Only when asked	✓	✓	✓	CP	Labour Party	
Granddaughter	Janet	Communist		Only when asked		✓	✓	Young socialists	Socialist parties	Not interviewed

Relationship to Veteran	Code	Veterans' Affiliation	Veteran was/is active in IBA	How often veteran spoke about Spain	Relatives' Trade Union Activity	Relatives' Demonstrations Activity	Relatives' Pressure Group Activity	Relatives' political affiliation while growing up	Relatives' political affiliation adulthood	Notes
Son	Len	Communist	Yes	Often	✓	✓	✓	N/K	N/K	
Son	Jeremy	Communist	Yes		✓	✓	✓	N/K	Labour Party	
Brother	DDq	Communist	Yes	Often	None	None	None	N/K	N/K	
Son	Mick	Communist	Yes	Often	✓	✓	✓	YCL	Labour Party	
Son	John	Communist	Yes	Often	✓	✓	✓	N/K	N/K	
Wife	Jean	Communist	Yes	Occasionally	None	None	None	None	None	Questionnaire completed by husband
Daughter	GGq	Communist		Never	None	None	None	None	None	
Son	FFq	Communist	Yes	Occasionally	None	None	None	None	None	
Wife	Ilq	N/K		Never	None	None	None	None	None	
Nephew	CCq	Communist	N/A	N/A	✓	✓	✓	N/K	N/K	Uncle killed in Spain
Sister	BBq	Communist	N/A	N/A	?	?	?	N/K	N/K	Political but did not specify. Brother killed in Spain.
Niece	AAq	Communist	N/A	N/A	?	?	?	N/K	N/K	Political but did not specify. Uncle killed in Spain

Final Settlements by Dependents' and Wounded Aid Committee.

[illegible]

Name	Age	Place	Married	Children	Weekly grant	Other income	General circumstances	Comments	Outcome	Date	Archive Reference
A. N. Cooper	31					Work 36s	Wishes to go to Australia to join relative	Wound R. leg	£70 passage and expen.	17/8/39	D/12
James Cornack	29	London			£1-5s			3 fingers L. hand amp.	£50 suggest		D13a
H. Croton		Wigan	✓	16 yrs 10s. 15yrs 12s. 8,5,3 and new born	£1-5s			L. ankle and R. leg		4/8/39	D/14
T. Donnelly	54	Birkenhead	✓	18 yrs	£1	14s UAB	Newsagents business	Back wound incapacitated	Suggest lump sum	6/8/39	D/15
Eugene Downing	26				£1-5s		Commercial course	Leg amp.	Course £20 Maint. £80	10/8/39	D/16
Patrick Duff					£1-5s		General stores business	L. arm dis. Wounds both arms.	Grant £120-150	15/8/39	D/17
Thomas Fanning	38	Manchester			£1	£1 paper selling	Purchase "pitch"	R. arm amputated	Pending purchase	1/8/39	D/18
R. Fields	30				£1-5s					15/8/39	D/19
George Forbes	22	East Aberdeen			15s		Lives with parents	R. leg wounds	6 months allowance	26/8/39	D/20
Frank Graham					£1			Stomach wound	£40 in all		D/21
Morgan Havard	25	London	✓	3 ½ yrs	£1-15s		Work found	R. arm amp.	£3-10s per week	17/8/39	D/22
T. Hughes	22	Cambuslang				Family all working 15s		L. leg amp. Artificial leg	? Grant	4/9/39	D/23
Vincent Hutchison	25	London			£1-5s			L. arm dis.	£40 training	23/8/39	D/24
Evan J. Jones	26	Llanelly			£1		Living with parents	L. arm amp.	? union. Op. on arm	5/8/39	D/25a

Name	Age	Place	Married	Children	Weekly grant	Other income	General circumstances	Comments	Outcome	Date	Archive Reference
Emrys Jones	32	Clydach Vale	✓	Beryl 6 yrs Annette 3 Ellen 2	£2		Learn new trade	Wound R. leg		4/8/39	D/26
John Larmour			✓		£1-5s			L. hand slightly par. Hand wound	£60 grant	17/8/39	D/27
E. Lloyd John Londragon	26	Bedlinog Aberdeen			10s	7/6 insurance	Lives with parents	R. arm 2 fingers missing	Further op. Final grant	28/8/39	D/28 D/29
James Lowry	24	Manchester	Possibly getting married		£1	Work £1-5s per week			£90 business	31/7/39	D/30
Hugh MacKay	24	Edinburgh			£1-5s			Multiple wounds both legs	Should be able to work after further treatment		D/31
P. Marlene James Mann		Blackpool	✓		£1-5s 10s			Diabetes Abdominal wound	£30 Suggest grant handled with help of local comrades	22/8/39 4/8/39	D/32 D/33a
Andrew McLerie	34	Rothsay			£1		Lives with mother and father died recently	Foot shattered	Grant £100	9/9/39	D/34
John Mitchson	35	Gateshead			£1		Living with parent	Spinal wound	Wait for position	2/8/39	D/35
Thomas Murphy		London			£1-5s			L. arm amp.			D37

Name	Age	Place	Married	Children	Weekly grant	Other income	General circumstances	Comments	Outcome	Date	Archive reference
Joseph Moran		Birkenhead	✓	8, 6 & 4 yrs	£2-5s		Separated from wife, living with mother	R. leg amp	Wife living with another man	14/8/39	D/36a
Sam Parkes	41	London			£1-5s		Partnership in confectionary business	Wound, L. arm disabled		14/8/39	D/38
Thomas Roberts	33		✓		£1		Living apart from wife with mother	R. leg amp.		4/8/39	D/39
Ralph Siddall	23							R. elbow locked and R. ankle fixed			D/40
Edward Sprenger					£1-5s		Broke leg June 1939	Wounds leg and arm			D/41
Joseph Stewart		Bishop Auckland			£1			Blind L. eye, wounds hand and leg			D/42
Arthur Teesdale		South Shields	✓		7/6	DAC		Arm disabled	£50 for fruit business		D/43
Leonard Thomson	24	Liverpool			£1			Finger R hand amp.	£50 grant	5/8/39	D/44
Edward Update	26	London			£1-5s			R. leg amp.		18/8/39	D/45
Terence Ward	22	Manchester			£1		Lodging with brother	Wound R. leg still discharging	Assist until doctor indicates discharge	2/8/39	D/46
Michael Waters	23				£1-5s		Training as driver mechanic	L wrist wound affecting fingers	£60	3/8/39	D/47

Name	Age	Place	Married	Children	Weekly grant	Other income	General circumstances	Comments	Outcome	Date	Archive Reference
K. White						Employed in eng. factory	Engineer – leg incapacitated from work occasionally	L. leg amp. Sores.	£60 for future emergencies	21/8/39	D/48
Thomas White					10s			TB throat			D/49
Edgar Williamson		Swansea					Purchase of photographic equip. for freelance work	3 fingers R. hand affected by wound in arm.	£40	21/8/39	D/50

Box File 39 File D. International Brigade Collection, Marx Memorial Library, London.

APPENDIX SEVEN**The Different Appearances of Memorials**

Type of Memorial	Number
Statue/Statuette	4
Plaque (names)	24
Plaque (no names)	9
To individual Brigader ¹	10
Building	3
Tree	3
Relief	2
Other i.e. memorabilia	5

¹ Includes two gravestones. Dorset and Swindon.

APPENDIX SEVEN (continuation)Situation of Memorials

Situation	Number
Civic Building (Town Hall, Guildhall etc.)	15
Public Building ¹ (Library, Village Hall etc.)	10
Progressive Building (Trade Union etc.) ²	8
Garden/Green Space	6
Peace Garden	6
Other Open Space ³	4
Open Space – industrial ⁴	3
Museum	2
Trades Council	2
Political Party Office	1
Church	1
Personal	1

¹ Public buildings mainly libraries but includes village halls and community centres.

² Progressive buildings mainly trade union sponsored buildings but also places/areas with working-class history such as Clerkenwell, London.

³ Other open space denotes the wider countryside usually near where individual Brigader was born, i.e. Kilarney, Ireland.

⁴ Open space – industrial denotes other than a park / green space, usually in the city centre.

APPENDIX EIGHT

Three pieces of correspondence with veterans

23.3.98

Dear Miss Meller,

I think it very important that students of history should understand that the Spanish Civil War was, in effect, the first battle of the 2nd World War. I won't go into details, but I have answered questions before from students - about that war.

Your research, however, though an interesting and valuable one, has a novel angle which puts me in a quandary, which is surprising 60- odd years after that war.

There are personal and confidential matters which are neither political nor historic but whose discussion among my relatives and friends would disturb the even tenor of my way and could upset several people.

I expect you need an early (and useful) reply but I must have time to think it over, and perhaps ask people if they mind being involved.

Perhaps you will have some more useful results from others.

Hopefully I shall write again before the end of April

Yours sincerely...

3 June 1998

Dear Miss Meller,

Thank-you for your letter of 13 May and enclosures. I have discussed your project with one of my daughters, now in her late 40's.

I think any hope of getting much response to a posted questionnaire is optimistic – too much like a cross-examination and inappropriate.

My guess is that you would be better to interview about a dozen people, descendants of members of the I.B., a selection covering England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and a variety of social status – workers, professionals.

How to find your sample?

A suggestion – look up names in or references to in:-

Imperial War Museum – Audio Tapes.

British Volunteers for Liberty – W. Alexander.

The Signal was Spain – J. Fyrth.

War Memorials of the Spanish Civil War – I.B.A. London.

The Shallow Grave – W. Gregory.

You need to have in mind when interviewing people that the families have in many instances suffered hardship as result of their forebear's involvement: for example widows and dependants received no state pension.

I avoided involving my children in talk of the war. As they grew up I think they picked up the meaning of those times without detailed knowledge. I would not ask them to take part in your survey. I hope my comments are to the point.

Yours sincerely....

21 May 1998

Dear Ms Meller,

Thank you for your letter and enclosure.

Yes, my wife will certainly respond as helpfully as she is able. As it will take several days to do it justice I am sending this assurance on her behalf.

You see, she has two customers! Her young brother, Max Nash, was killed on the Ebro in July, '38, and she will wish to write about him, as a lad for whom she was very fond. Secondly, I was in the J.B. from May '37 until the end, December, '38. so she says I too qualify! I'm sure you will agree that it would not be practicable to work the two on one form, so perhaps you will send another? She will get cracking on one or the other meantime.

Your 'angle' is both interesting and unusual – a pleasing break from the customary requests for my own contribution. Though Sadie will, perforce, have occasion to use me, the views and opinions she offers will be her own.

However, and casting modesty aside, I hope you will, perhaps, be willing to persuade De Montfort to follow several other universities including Oxford, Cambridge, both Manchesters, Sussex and Essex, to get my Memoirs on their Library shelves. It was published by Michigan State University Press in November, '96 and is available here on order from bookshops. I regret the high price – £26.50, not my doing, but should you wish to read it first, it can be borrowed from the public Library. I dare to suggest you would not be wasting your time. 'Soaking up atmosphere' and all that...

This last paragraph aside and to return to the more relevant matter of your work, Sadie says to tell she will do her best and as soon as she can.

Strength to your elbow with your studies and good luck!

Sincerely,

Fred and Sadie Thomas.

APPENDIX NINE

Backgrounds of Interview Sample

Jeremy– the son of an IB veteran. He is a professor of medicine, in his fifties, and originates from London. Interview conducted in Stoke, 9 February 1998.

Len – the son of an IB veteran and older brother of **Jeremy**. He is a film director in his early sixties. Interview conducted in Hampshire, 23 February 1998. Their father is still alive.

Jean – the wife of an IB veteran who is still alive. She has lived near Manchester all of her life and is in her sixties. Interview conducted Salford, 23 June 1998.

John – the only son of an IB veteran who died in 1996. He is a lecturer in Law and originates from London. Interview conducted Exeter, 6 July 1998.

Dora– the daughter of an IB veteran who died in 1986. She is a retired lecturer and has lived in and around London all of her life. Interview conducted London, 24 August 1998.

James – *the son of an International Brigade surgeon*. He went on also to become a doctor and practised in Wales for some time going into partnership with another doctor. He was born in London. Interview conducted Swansea, 22 October 1998.

Alfred– The husband of a volunteer nurse who died a month after the interview. They spent most of their married life in Buckinghamshire. He was born into the aristocracy but became a committed Communist after meeting his wife in 1939. His daughter is **Lydia**. Interview conducted London, 1 December 1998.

Lydia – is in her fifties and lives in London. She has been politically active all of her life and is now a Labour councillor. She lives near to her father **Alfred**, and has two children. Interview conducted London, 1 December 1998.

Family interview with **Kitty, Pam and Paul**. This was the only family interview, which was conducted at the home of Paul in Leicestershire. **Kitty** was the wife of a veteran, some years older than her, who died in 1998. She is in her seventies and lives in Brighton. She writes and until she retired worked as an OU lecturer. Her daughter **Pam** lives in Romford and works as a teacher. She has always been politically active. Her brother **Paul** is seven years older than her and is apolitical. They were brought up in Brighton. Interview conducted Leicester, 15 February 1999.

Susie – in her eighties lives in Brentwood and has been politically active since the Spanish Civil War. Her veteran husband passed away a year after the interview. She also had a brother who was killed in Spain. Interview conducted Brentwood, 24 November 1998.

Jimmy – The son of an International Brigade veteran who died in the 1980's. He is in his forties, a social worker and lives in Bognor Regis. Interview conducted Bognor Regis, 23 January 1999.

Harold – in his eighties lost his elder brother at the Battle of Brunete. He is close friends with an ex-Brigader and has campaigned for more memorials in honour of the volunteers to be erected around Wales. Interview conducted South Wales, 30 March 1999.

Rhodri – in his late seventies at the time of the interview has lived in Merthyr Tydfil all of his life. His veteran brother lived nearby until his death in March 2001. Interview conducted Merthyr Tydfil 4 February 1999.

Martha – The wife of an International Brigader who died in the late 1980's. They lived in Kent during their married life. She is in her seventies and now lives in London. Interview conducted London, 15 March 1999.

Mark – both of his parents were volunteers. His father was killed on the last day of International Brigade fighting when **Mark** was four years old. His mother went to Spain as a hospital administrator. She remained faithful to the Communist Party all of her life. **Mark** has no party political affiliation. He is a freelance writer. Interview conducted Cornwall, 27 June 1999.

Ray – is a deputy head-teacher and has lived in South Wales all of his life. He wrote a biography of his volunteer grandfather who died in 1981 just before it was published. Interview conducted South Wales, 8 October 1999.

Owen – Has lived in South Wales all of his life. He was eleven when his father was killed at the Battle of Brunete. Now in his seventies he was a painter and decorator until his retirement. He is apolitical. Interview conducted Bridgend, 18 August 1999.

Gwyn – was thirteen when he lost his father. He died eleven months after returning from Spain as a result of his time out there. Now in his seventies **Gwyn** was born and brought up in Merthyr Tydfil. Interview conducted Braintree, 11 August 1999.

Mick – is a retired university lecturer in his late fifties at the time of the interview. His veteran father died in the mid 1980's. He has a sister and two brothers. Both **Mick** and his sister have been politically active all of their lives, whilst his brothers are not. He has lived in the north of England all of his life. Interview conducted Sheffield, 5 August 1999.

Joe - is a music promoter and son of an IB veteran who died in the early 1960's. He is an orthodox Communist and has lived in South Wales all of his life. Interview conducted on tape November 1999.

Nigel – is the youngest son of a Scottish veteran. Brother of **Neil**. He is in his late thirties and works for the local authority. Until recently he lived in Glasgow. Personalised Questionnaire, Edinburgh, February 2000.

Neil - is the older brother of **Nigel**. He is in his forties and lives in the Scottish Highlands with his young family. He owns his own business. Personalised Questionnaire, Isle of Skye, August 2000